DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 687 UD 030 498

AUTHOR Yau, Maria
TITLE Refugee Students in Toronto Schools: An Exploratory Study. No. 211.
INSTITUTION Toronto Board of Education (Ontario). Research Dept.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-88881-234-5; ISSN-0316-8786
PUB DATE Feb 95
NOTE 138p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; *Adjustment (to Environment); Adolescents; Children; *Cultural Differences; Disadvantaged Youth; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Immigrants; Interviews; Professional Development; *Refugees; Special Needs Students; *Urban Schools; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS Canada; Ontario (Toronto); *Toronto Public Schools ON

ABSTRACT

An exploratory study of the refugees in the Toronto (Ontario, Canada) public school system examined: (1) their situation, including their numbers and distributions, countries of origin, demographic characteristics, and challenges and needs at school; (2) how teachers and other school staff deal with the situation, and the kinds of difficulties they have encountered; and (3) ways to help teachers, schools and the school system meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of newly arrived refugees. Nineteen bilingual interviewers interviewed 135 refugee students and 60 refugee parents representing 7 different language groups. Data from student registration files, focus groups, and observations of Local School Team meetings supplemented the interviews to give a picture of the refugee population that, by late 1994, made up almost 10 percent of the city's public school student population. In some inner-city schools, refugees constituted as much as a quarter of the population. Most refugee students were adolescents or young adults, but there were nearly 3,000 refugee children in the Toronto schools in 1994. These students come from very diverse backgrounds, and their needs are complicated by social and emotional factors associated with being refugees. Many are in a disadvantaged position academically. School staff in general do not feel adequately prepared to help these students. The final chapter of this report offers suggestions for providing better information for school staff and for refugees and their families, for developing whole-school approaches to refugee needs, and for making better use of the facilities and services now available. Seven appendixes contain interview and focus group protocols and an observation guide. (Contains 11 figures, 4 tables, and 40 references.) (SLD)

ED 384 687

Refugee Students in Toronto Schools: An Exploratory Study

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
MARIA YAU
Toronto Board of Education
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

No. 211

W030 498

Research Services
Toronto Board of Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ISSN 0316-8786
ISBN 0-88881-234-5

Refugee Students in Toronto Schools: An Exploratory Study

February 1995

Maria Yau

Preface

While this report is long overdue in light of the growing refugee population in our schools and these students' social, emotional and academic needs, some might find its release untimely in view of the growing budget constraints facing Toronto and other school boards. It is true that financial resources are necessary to address the multifaceted needs of refugee students. Yet many meaningful services, at least in the case of the Toronto Board of Education, can be offered to these newly arrived students without *substantial* capital costs. Most of the suggested actions included in the report are *not* add-ons to the system. Rather they are systematic attempts to bring the Board's philosophy and goal towards equity and excellence in outcome and opportunities for all students to its fullest by tapping into a wide range of large and small-scale initiatives, services and resources already existing within and without the School Board. Many of the social and academic needs of refugee students can be met:

- o through such Board-wide initiatives as "A Curriculum for All Students" (in particular an inclusive curriculum), ESL Programs, International Languages Programs, the Advisory-advisee Program, Parental Involvement, Anti-racist Education, and Conflict Resolution - as long as the needs of refugee students are identified and addressed in the implementation of these initiatives;

- o by sharing, supporting and co-ordinating at the system level exemplary local programs initiated by individual staff, schools or departments as possible strategies and resources for schools or teachers who have the needs. Some of these exemplary programs include: in-school ESL training for school staff; integration of international language staff as part of the formal support to the regular school program; in-school reception services; team teaching with ESL teachers; and various first-language support programs developed by the ESL Department - e.g. first-language tutors/mentors, bilingual co-op students as part-time teacher assistants, first-language co-op programs for adult students, translated reading materials for students, and first-language assessments;

- by making more effective use of some of the special services and resources already existing within the system such as the Reception Welcoming Centres, Adult ESL credit and non-credit programs, School Community Advisors, International Language Instructors, and other multi-lingual support staff;

- by working in partnership with various concerned groups outside the school system including ethnic communities, social and mental health agencies, post-secondary institutions, and the different levels of governments for their support in terms of services, information, expertise, and funding; and

- most important of all, by raising all educators' awareness, sensitivity and understanding of the unique circumstances and needs of these students, who would otherwise be overlooked or neglected.

It should, however, be noted that refugees themselves are not passive recipients of services or welfare from the host society. As indicated in the study, many refugee families and students deem it their responsibility to resolve their own difficulties. However, successful integration into a new environment is a two-way process, in which the larger community has a role to play in facilitating the adjustment process of the newcomers. Furthermore, refugee students do not come with only problems and difficulties. They bring with them their talents, their strengths, their cultures, and their unique histories and experiences - which are valuable resources that educators can capitalize on for the benefit of *all* students.

Finally, while this report focuses on refugee students and is thus mainly intended for those educators who work with this particular group of students, many of the issues addressed in the study can also be applied to other students who experience such difficulties as poverty, gaps in education, language barriers, cultural shock, social isolation, alienation or rejection by others. Hence, many of the findings and suggestions covered in this report will also be of interest to educators of other students, especially those students who share some of the predicaments experienced by their refugee counterparts.

Acknowledgments

This study would not have been possible without the assistance of 19 bilingual interviewers, who interviewed nearly 200 refugee students and parents from seven Toronto's schools. Seven of the interviewers were indeed Toronto School Board's multicultural support staffs who volunteered their time for the study. They were School Community Advisors - Julieta Carassco-Salvo, John Lau and Tong Vuong; and Welcoming/Reception Workers - Yolanda Ble, Kim Cuc Nguyen, Betty Ong, Vivian Thang, and Angelina Yu. Their generous co-operation is deeply appreciated.

Special thanks are also due to the following staff members who served on the Advisory Team for this project, not only as advisors but also as focus group facilitators and school observers. These members included:

- Ester Cole, Multicultural Team Co-ordinator, Psychology
- Marlinda Freire, Chief Psychiatrist
- Don Irwin, Senior Superintendent, Curriculum
- Marion Levi, former Acting Co-ordinator, Guidance & Counselling
- Fran Parkin, ESL/ESD Consultant
- Faiz Rahman, Multicultural Team Co-ordinator, Social Work Services
- Joyce Rogers, ESL/ESD Co-ordinator
- John Stewart, former Assistant Co-ordinator, Guidance & Counselling
- Myrna Tidd, former Assistant Co-ordinator, Guidance & Counselling
- Suzanne Ziegler, former Chief Research Officer

I would like to further acknowledge the contributions of four of the above-mentioned staff - Ester Cole, Marlinda Freire, Joyce Rogers and Suzanne Ziegler; the ESL Consultant - Nanci Goldman; my colleagues - Maisy Cheng, Lisa Rosolen, and Robert Brown; and my husband - Siu-lam Kwong in proofreading and in offering valuable suggestions to the last draft of the report.

Executive Summary

This exploratory study on refugee students in Toronto has three objectives:

1. to understand the situation of refugee students who enroled in Toronto public schools - in terms of their numbers, countries of origin, demographic profiles, history, background, and school adjustment;

2. to examine how school staff dealt with the change in student population, and the challenges they faced; and

3. to identify helpful ways for teachers, schools, and the school system in order to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of the newly arrived refugee students.

The findings of the study were based on:

- hundreds of hours of interviews with refugee students and parents, educators, consultants and mental health professionals within the system;

- a series of observations of Local School Team meetings in a number of elementary and secondary schools;

- data extracted from the Board's student registration files, and the latest Every Secondary School Student Survey conducted within the Board in 1991-92; and

- a review of related literature, especially Canadian sources.

The following summary highlights some of the important findings discussed in the full report.

- By late 1994, refugee students made up almost 10% of Toronto's public school students (13% of the secondary, and 7% of the elementary). Their presence was even more prominent in some inner-city schools, where they constituted as high as a quarter of the school population. While the majority of Toronto's refugee students were adolescents or young adults, the number of refugee children grew rapidly from 2,000 in 1991 to 3,000 in 1994.

- Refugees in the 1990s are from all corners of the world and all walks of life, representing a very diverse group of newcomers with different political, social, cultural, and educational backgrounds.

- Refugees have special needs. Although both refugees and immigrants share common difficulties in coping with a new language and culture, they differ considerably in almost all aspects of their pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences - experiences that have strong implications for their settlement, psychosocial and academic needs. For instance, the traumatic and volatile pre-migration situations, and the long and uncertain migration journeys had not only interrupted or disrupted formal education for young refugees, but had also affected their social and emotional well-being. Having arrived in a safe country did not end their experiences as refugees; they were still plagued by a host of post-migration obstacles that were more typical of refugees than of immigrants. These included:

- post-traumatic stress symptoms and an on-going sense of fear;
- precarious residency status and endurance of long bureaucratic processes;
- disintegration of family units;
- desperate financial situations;
- frequent relocations; and
- intense cultural disorientation.

These students are not simply students of different cultures; they carry with them extraordinary social and emotional needs that make their overall adjustment complicated.

o Due to their many preoccupations resulting from the circumstances highlighted above, school experiences for refugee students are complex and unique in nature. Although most refugee students interviewed had expressed their overall satisfaction with the school, socially they were still far from being accepted by, or feeling part of, the mainstream within the school. On one hand, there were newly arrived refugees, especially those with wide educational gaps, who stood out in class due to maladaptive behaviours (e.g. being unable to follow class routines or to remain seated during lessons). On the other hand, there were others who were withdrawn and overwhelmed by an unfamiliar school environment. Feelings of alienation, discrimination, and sometimes even rejection by other students were not uncommon among these recently arrived refugees. Many were easy targets of bullying and racial incidents; being new to the system and the language, being insecure about their own status, and being preoccupied with their many settlement needs, these students were less able to defend themselves except for passive avoidance. Furthermore, while most reported being comfortable and open with their ESL teachers, many perceived their regular class/subject teachers distant, unsympathetic and uninterested in them.

o With regard to academic performance, many refugee students were in a disadvantaged position.

  - While day-to-day classroom learning activities are normal routines for students, they could be a considerable strain and pressure for refugee students in terms of understanding teacher instruction, participating in class, completing class work or home assignments, and coping with regular subjects. This is especially true of refugee students who previously experienced frequent interruptions in schooling or had wide gaps in education. Aside from acquiring proficiency in their second language, many of these students need extra support in establishing their foundation skills, as well as an understanding and inclusive learning environment which takes their unique circumstances into consideration.
  - Regarding secondary school program placement, a notably higher proportion of refugee students were enroled in non-academic streams compared with immigrant or Canadian-born students (over a third versus about a quarter). While it is unfortunate that refugee students generally had a lower aspiration level than other students (less than half aspired for university versus about 60% among others), it is even more troubling to see a significant proportion of refugee students (19% as compared to 4% among the Canadian-born, and 7% among immigrants) who intended to go on to university but were enroled in the streams that would not likely lead to this goal. Refugee students definitely need help in familiarizing themselves with the school system, educational requirements, and the kinds of post-secondary opportunities offered by different programs.

- In terms of academic achievement, refugee students who had fewer interruptions in their previous schooling, who were in a more stable psychosocial state after migration, who were highly motivated, or who had strong family support were less likely to drop out from school than those refugees who had undergone and were still in an adverse condition. Indeed, it was found that some refugee groups, especially recent refugees from Central America and Africa, were one of the most at-risk groups in the system.

o School staff perceptions and attitude towards refugee students ranged from those who showed great concern and sympathy for the students to those who either were unaware of the needs of these students or simply did not see these newcomers as a source of concern. While many individual teachers did provide these students with opportunities for easier transitions, adjustment and integration into the new school system, staff in general admitted that they were *not* equipped to meet the needs of this growing population due to:
  - the general lack of information and training about refugee students;
  - the lack of and/or difficulty in identifying refugee students;
  - limited availability or accessibility to resources, including multi-lingual staff;
  - difficulties reaching parents and linking them to school.

  Classroom teachers also faced additional challenges caused by the unpredictable nature of refugee students' school entrance and stay. It was more common to find refugee students than other students enroled in a school in the middle of a school year, or to find them switching schools within weeks or months after enrolment due to resettlement needs.

o Schools in general have not defined refugee students as a school issue, which may partly explain for the general lack of systematic approaches to meet the needs of this fast growing population. Nevertheless, a few schools offered some interesting programs, which were not designed for refugee students *per se* but did turn out to benefit this particular group of students. Some of these programs included offering in-school reception classes, integrated heritage/international language programs, team teaching with ESL teachers, and first-language buddy and peer tutoring programs.

o The last chapter of the report offers suggested action plans as to:
  - how various administrative departments of the Board could provide needed information for the school staff, and refugee students and their families respectively;
  - how individual schools can help meet the needs of these newcomers with a **whole-school approach** along with outreach to parents; and
  - how the system as a whole can offer necessary in-service for appropriate school and education office staff; make more effective use of its existing services and resources such as ESL programs, reception/welcoming centres, and bilingual support staff; and solicit external support from the community, social and mental health agencies, post-secondary institutions, and the provincial and federal governments.

o Finally, it is our hope that this report will help raise educators' awareness, sensitivity and understanding of refugee students, who are here to stay and who form a significant proportion of our school population. We believe such knowledge and understanding constitutes the first important step towards helping refugee students become integrated into the school system.

CONTENTS

Preface i
Acknowledgements ii
Executive Summary iv
Table of Contents vii

Part I: Background

Chapter 1 Introduction 1
- Background and objectives 1
- Information sources and data collection methods 3
- Organization and format of the report 5
- Limitations and implications of the report 6

Chapter 2 Refugee Population in Toronto Schools 7
- Definitions of refugees 7
- Identification of refugee students 8
- Number of refugee students 9
- General demographic profiles 10

PART II: Refugee Students' Pre-migration, Migration and Post-migration Experiences

Chapter 3 Pre-migration and Migration Experiences of Refugee Students 15
- Pre-migration experiences and former schooling 15
- Migration experiences and their effects on schooling 16

Chapter 4 Post-migration Experiences: Obstacles to Refugees' Initial Adjustment and Resettlement 23
- Post-traumatic stress and an on-going sense of fear 24
- Precarious status and endurance of long bureaucratic processes 25
- Disintegration of family units 28
- Financial difficulties 30
- Frequent relocations 35
- Cultural disorientation 37
- Some implications 39

Part III: Refugee Students' Experiences in Toronto Schools

Chapter 5 Adjustment and Social Relationships at School 41
Overall school satisfaction 41
Classroom behaviour 42
Relationship with students 45
Peer associations 45
Racial incidents 46
Relationship with teachers 48

Chapter 6 Academic Adjustment and Performance 51
Program placement 51
School-grade placement 51
Program level, post-secondary school plans and aspirations 53
Placement in ESL versus regular class programs 56
Classroom challenges facing refugee students 58
School achievement 63
Motivation and aspiration 66
Homework 67
Parental and family support 68

Part IV: Staff, School and the Board Responses to Refugee Students

Chapter 7 Responses to Refugee Students 73
Staff awareness and attitudes 74
Regular classroom / subject teachers 74
ESL teachers 77
Guidance counsellors 80
Social workers 82
Welcoming/reception workers 83
Psycho-educational consultants 84
Special education teachers 84
School community advisors (S.C.A.s) 85
Some common challenges facing various staff groups 85
School responses and initiatives 86
Overall school responses 86
Some effective school initiatives 86
System responses 89

Chapter 8 What Can be Done? 91
Provision and dissemination of information 92
Research Services 92
The Curriculum and Program Division & Student Support Services 92
The Public Information Office 93
Activities suggested for individual schools: A whole-school approach 94
Reception/Welcoming Centres 94
School-based reception 95
Student assessment 96
Support in first language 96
Classroom programs 97
Support outside the classroom 97
Parent involvement 98
Support for school staff 99
Actions for the school system to consider 100
Support needed at the Board level 100
External support needed 102

REFERENCES 103

APPENDIX 1. Interview Protocol for School-aged Refugee Students 106
APPENDIX 2. Interview Protocol for Adult Refugee Students 111
APPENDIX 3. Interview Protocol for Refugee Parents 115
APPENDIX 4. Protocol for Teachers' Focus Group Meetings 118
APPENDIX 5. Protocol for Principals' Focus Group Meetings 122
APPENDIX 6. Protocol for Support Staff Focus Group Meetings 124
APPENDIX 7. Local School Team Observation Guides 126

Figures

Figure 1: Sources of information for the study 2
Figure 2: Gender distribution by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92) 10
Figure 3: Age distribution by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92) 11
Figure 4: Parental presence at home by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92) 12
Figure 5: Parents' socio-economic status by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92) 12
Figure 6: Program Level by students' residency status 53
Figure 7: Post-secondary school plans of refugee students 54
Figure 8: Post-secondary school plans by students' residency status 55
Figure 9: Students' aspirations and program placement 55
Figure 10: School achievement by residency status 64
Figure 11: Amount of time spent on homework by students' residency status 67

Tables

Table 1: Number of refugee students and parents interviewed by language groups 4
Table 2: Distributions and proportions of refugee students in Toronto 9
Table 3: Part-time work by students' residency status 31
Table 4: Part-time work of different refugee groups 68

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background and objectives

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a rapid growth of refugee[1] population in Toronto - an increase not only in number but also in diversity. Unlike in the 1970s or early 1980s, recent refugees no longer originate in just one or two countries; rather they are coming from most continents. This phenomenon is reflected in the Toronto school system, where the enrolment of refugee students from different ethnic backgrounds has risen steadily in both its elementary and secondary schools over the past few years. For instance, it was estimated that in late 1991 the Toronto School Board had roughly 5,500 refugee students coming from nine major source countries; by late 1994, due to the rising number of refugee producing countries over the years, especially those from Eastern Europe, the refugee population in Toronto's schools grew to about 6,900 (an increase of 25%).[2]

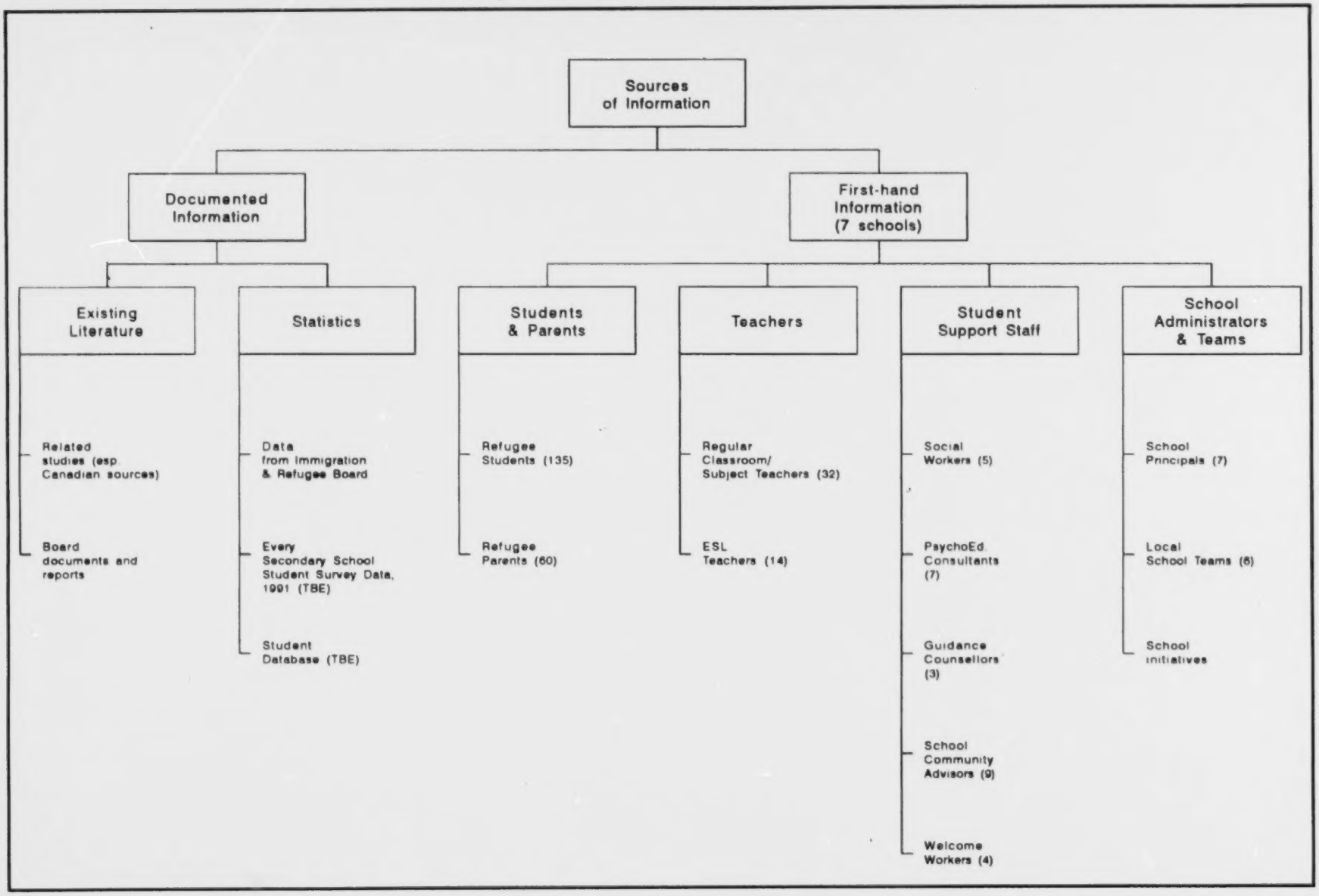
Despite the significant inflow of refugee students, little is known about them. Questions such as - who they are, how many there are, where they came from, where they tend to concentrate, and what their situations and needs are - are often left unanswered. The Guidance and Counselling Department of the Toronto Board of Education (TBE), which has been dealing with a large number of refugee students in the city, requested Research Services to investigate the refugee situation in the school system as a whole. Since not much was known about these students at the time, an *exploratory study* was proposed with a three-fold objective:

---

1. For a definition of "refugee", see pp.7-8.

2. See Chapter 2 for details about the source countries, methods of identification, the estimates and proportions of refugee students.

Figure 1: Sources of information for the study



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. to better understand the situation of refugee students in Toronto's schools - their numbers and distributions, countries of origin, demographic characteristics, family background, migration process, settlement and adjustments, and their challenges and needs at school;

2. to examine how teachers and other school staff deal with the situation, and the kinds of difficulties they have encountered in the process; and

3. to identify ways to help teachers, schools and the school system meet the academic, social and emotional needs of newly arrived refugee students.

Information sources and data collection methods

Due to a dearth of research on refugee students, efforts were made to gather comprehensive information from different sources. As illustrated in Figure 1, multiple sources were employed, which can be divided into two major types: documented information and first-hand information.

1. Documented information consisted of related literature, mainly studies conducted in Canada; refugee claimant statistics gathered from the Immigration and Refugee Board; pertinent documents from the Toronto School Board; student school registration records; and data extracted from the Board's latest Every Secondary Student Survey conducted in 1991-92. Although most of these sources do not deal with refugee students *per se*, they supplement the data we gathered first-hand from the students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and support staff.

2. First-hand information formed the core of this study. Seven Toronto schools with a high proportion of refugee students were sampled. They included four elementary schools, two secondary schools, and one adult school. In these seven schools, the following data collection procedures were undertaken:

a. **individual interviews** with 135 refugee students and 60 refugee parents representing seven different language groups (see Table 1, p.4). The interviews were conducted individually by 19 trained interpreters in order to encourage candid discussions with the students and parents.

Table 1: Number of refugee students and parents interviewed by language groups

Language groups (Countries of birth)	Number of students		Number of parents
	Secondary	Elementary	
Tamil (Sri Lanka)	16	13	19
Chinese (China)	9	9	10
Vietnamese/Chinese (Vietnam)	17	15	21
Persian (Iran/Afghanistan)	14	2	3
Spanish (Central America)	12	1	5
Ethiopian (Ethiopia)	15	0	2
Somali (Somalia)	12	0	0
TOTAL	95	40	60

b. a series of **focus group interviews** with 32 classroom teachers, 14 teachers who taught English as a Second Language (i.e. ESL teachers), seven school principals as well as representatives from five different student support professional groups (see Figure 1, p.2); and

c. **observations** of Local School Team meetings in the seven sampled schools. (These teams, which are mandatory in Toronto Board schools, consist of school administrators, teaching staff and student support personnel. The major functions of these school-based, multidisciplinary teams are to identify needs and to co-ordinate services for students of individual schools.)

The data obtained from these interviews and observations allow for an in-depth examination of the refugee student issue from various perspectives - i.e. the perspective of the students and parents themselves as well as that of the teachers, school administrators, and other professional support staff.

In addition, an advisory team was formed with a number of Board members whose work was related to the refugee population. These members included two researchers, a curriculum superintendent, the chief psychiatrist, a supervisory psychologist, a social worker, guidance counsellors, an English as a Second Language (ESL) co-ordinator, and a ESL consultant. Aside from playing an advisory role for the project, each member of the team also acted as an observer of a Local School Team meeting, and as a facilitator of a focus group interview with members of her/his professional group.

Organization and format of the report

This report is divided into four major parts, each of which consists of two chapters.

- Part I: Background - Chapter 1 discusses the objectives, data sources, and the structure of the report. Chapter 2 provides an overview of refugee students in Toronto: definitions and identification of refugee students; their numbers, demographic profiles and distributions in the city.

- Part II: Refugee students' pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences - Chapter 3 describes young refugees' pre-migration and migration experiences in relation to their former schooling. Chapter 4 examines the adjustment and resettlement challenges facing these students and their families after landing in Canada.

- Part III: Refugee students' experiences in Toronto schools - Chapter 5 describes the students' overall satisfaction with the schools, their general classroom behaviour, and their social relationships with local students and teachers. Chapter 6 takes a close look at their school performance and academic needs.

- Part IV: School and staff responses - Chapter 7 discusses how teachers, student support staff and the school as a whole have been dealing with the situation. The final chapter, Chapter 8, offers suggestions and a school-based model as to how teachers, individual schools, and the school system can address the issue.

As this exploratory study was based primarily on individual and focus-group interviews, a large collection of anecdotes and case studies were gathered. Some of these data, which offer concrete examples and useful details to the study, are incorporated and printed in italics within boxes or as footnotes; readers who want to focus on the general discussion may wish to concentrate on the main text.

To supplement the study, pertinent literature findings are *integrated* into appropriate parts of the report (instead of being presented in a separate literature review section). Where quantitative data were available to substantiate some of the findings, numerical tables and graphical charts are used. Furthermore, throughout the report, certain statements that are considered important messages for educators are highlighted (in ***bold italics***).

Limitations and implications of the report

It should be noted that no attempts have been made to generalize the qualitative findings of this report to the *total* population of refugee students, since no probability sampling scheme was adopted in the study. A lack of information on our refugee students at the time of the research did not allow us to develop an adequate sampling frame of refugee students from which representative subjects could be selected. Instead, the seven schools were chosen by identifying, through the Board's on-line student registration records, schools that had a significant number of newly arrived foreign-born students from countries where most recent refugees originated. Therefore, readers should be cautioned that the findings of the report may represent only some of the issues faced by the "population" of refugee students.

Nevertheless, the literature review and the hundreds of hours of interviews with nearly 300 individuals do provide us with a better understanding of refugee students in Toronto schools. ***Hopefully the information presented in this report will have the effect of raising readers' awareness, sensitivity and understanding of the issue - an effect which in itself constitutes the first important step towards helping refugee students and their families.***

Chapter 2

Refugee Population in Toronto Schools

Definitions of refugees

According to the 1951 United Nations Convention, refugees are "people who, because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinions, are unwilling or unable to return to their country of nationality or former habitual residence". While this definition is still adopted by the federal government, it has been increasingly criticized for being too narrow and outdated. For instance, it fails to include those who seek refugee status for economic reasons, generally known as economic refugees. According to M. Freire, the chief psychiatrist of the Toronto School Board, "even though there is a difference in terms of economic and political refugees, ..., most frequently than not, both groups left their countries as a result of traumatic experiences and both have been subjected to a great deal of stress in the process of migrating and initial adjustment to the receiving society."

Another way of defining refugees is based on one's legal status - i.e. to include only those who are "refugee claimants". These are people who arrived in the country and claimed refugee status at an Immigration Centre, which granted them the refugee claimant status upon hearings. However, this definition is also restrictive, as it excludes the so-called "illegal immigrants" who came and stayed in this country with neither immigrant, refugee nor any other official status, either because they had not applied for it, or because their claims were denied. Furthermore, this legal definition omits a large group of "refugee immigrants" who landed in Canada legally as immigrants but were *de facto* refugees. Most of them were from South East Asia, who escaped from their home country and stayed in refugee camps for lengthy periods of time until they were finally accepted by the Canadian government as refugee immigrants.

For the purpose of this study, a broader definition of refugees was adopted by including three groups of newcomers: *refugee claimants*, *refugee immigrants*, and *illegal immigrants*. Although the definition is broad, it does distinguish these three groups of newcomers from "regular" immigrants who came to this country through formal immigration channels - i.e. having to go through the federal government's point-system screening process, which includes such criteria as physical health and financial status. As will be discussed in this report, this distinction is important. ***While both groups - immigrants and refugees - are new to the country, their pre-migration, migration, and post-migration experiences as well as their adjustment process are so different that they could hardly be identified as a homogeneous group.***

Identification of refugee students

Even with the broad definition mentioned above, the identification of these students is complex, since the school board's student registration information system does not keep data on students' legal status. For individual schools which attempt to maintain some records, much depends on students' voluntary report, and there is no guarantee that the information being documented is complete, consistent, accurate, or updated.[3]

Without any official records, refugee students could only be identified through two *indirect* criteria.

1. The first criterion was students' countries of origin. That is to include students who originated in one of the major source countries from where most refugees fled in recent years. Based on the 1990 figures supplied by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, nine main refugee providing countries were identified: Sri Lanka, Vietnam, China, Iran, Somalia, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.[4]

2. The second criterion was students' recency of arrival. Since this study focuses on *recent* refugees, only those who arrived Canada within the past four years were considered.

---

3. For instance, one elementary school did attempt to record such information in the file of the student known to be a refugee during registration. It was understandable that some refugees avoided identifying themselves as such at the time of registration.

4. We recognized that in recent years, the number of refugees from East European countries has been growing. But since our first data were collected in 1991, refugees from countries such as Poland, Bulgaria, Albania and the former USSR were not included in this exploratory study.

Based on these two criteria, students were identified from the Toronto Schoo! Board on-line student registration records. In order to ensure that the students so identified fit into one of the three groups of refugees described above - *refugee claimants*, *refugee immigrants*, and *illegal immigrants* - a sample of the students and/or parents were contacted individually through consent forms and telephone verification. It was confirmed that a large majority of these students did fall under one of the three groups of newcomers.

Number of refugee students

With the indirect identification method, it was estimated that in late 1991, the Toronto School Board had approximately 5,500 students coming from the abovementioned countries between the years 1988 and 1991. This represented roughly eight percent of the Toronto Board's student population of the time. A closer look at the data indicates that the majority of these students were enroled in secondary schools. Therefore, if we look at the proportion at each panel, as of late 1991, refugee students made up approximately:

- 12% (about 3,500) of the Toronto secondary school student population, and
- 5% (about 2,000) of the Toronto elementary student population.

In late 1994, the number of refugee students grew to about 6,900 - an increase of 25% within a three-year period. The rise could be attributed to the additional refugee producing countries over the last few years, in particular those from Eastern Europe.[5] Table 2 shows the distributions and proportions of Toronto's refugee students in the two time periods. It is clear that the refugee student population has been rising steadily for the past few years, making up from eight to nine percent of the total student population, with a significant growth at the elementary school level from 2,000 to 3,000 strong (an increase of 50%).

Table 2: Distributions and proportions of refugee students in Toronto

Toronto Schools	Late 1991*		Late 1994**	
	Estimated number	Percent of total population	Estimated number	Percent of total population
Secondary	3,500	12%	3,900	13%
Elementary	2,000	5%	3,000	7%
Overall	5,500	8%	6,900	9%

*Students from 9 countries arriving between 1988 and 1991

**Students from 15 countries arriving between 1991 and 1994

5. The countries in the 1994 estimates included all the above-mentioned countries plus the former USSR, Russia, former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Poland, Peru, Sudan and Afghanistan. The selection of these countries was based on recent statistics obtained from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board.

It should be pointed out that newly arrived refugee families tended to concentrate geographically in inner-city areas, especially in the east and west pockets of the City of Toronto, where they first settled. Hence, the presence of these students was most prominent in inner-city schools. In fact, it was estimated that in some of these schools, as high as one in four of the students were from some kinds of refugee backgrounds.

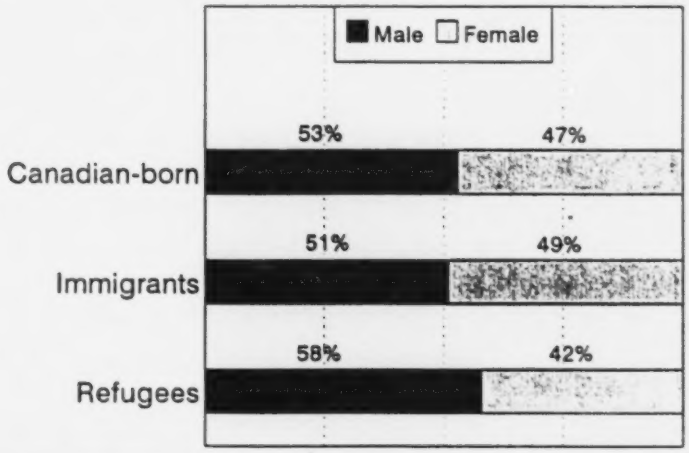
General demographic profiles

Data extracted from the 1991-92 Toronto Board Secondary Student Survey show some interesting profiles of refugee students in Toronto's secondary schools.[6] As illustrated below, ***their socio-demographic characteristics were distinct from those of the immigrant and the general student population.***

Gender

In the Toronto School Board as a whole, there was a slight overrepresentation of male students as compared to female students. The overrepresentation, however, was more apparent among the refugee population, especially at the secondary level. (See Figure 2.) This phenomenon may be partially explained by the fact that young men from many refugee countries, for example Sri Lanka and Somalia, are likely to be the first family members to flee from their homeland while others stay behind. (Refer to Chapter 4 for details.)

Figure 2: Gender distribution by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92)

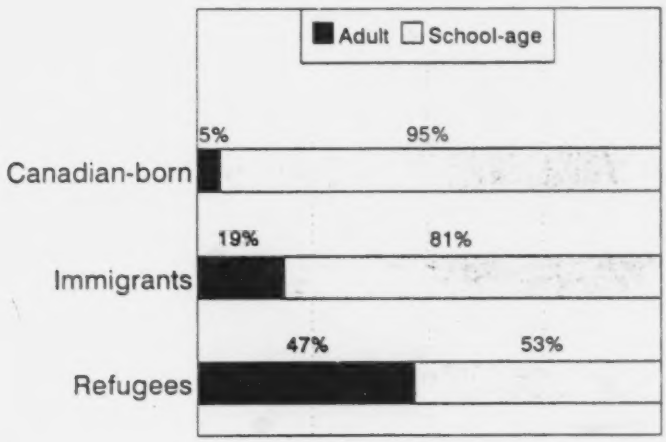


6. Since the 1991-92 system-wide student survey was for secondary schools only, similar profiles for elementary-school students were not available. To extract the "potential" refugee students from the 1991-92 student survey database, the same identification criteria used in this study (p.8) were employed.

Age

Another distinctive characteristic of refugee students was that a large proportion were over 19 years of age. This is especially true of those from Ethiopia, Somalia, Iran and Sri Lanka. As shown in Figure 3, of all refugee students in secondary schools, nearly half (47%) were over 19 years of age, as compared to 19% among other foreign-born students, and 5% among the Canadian-born.

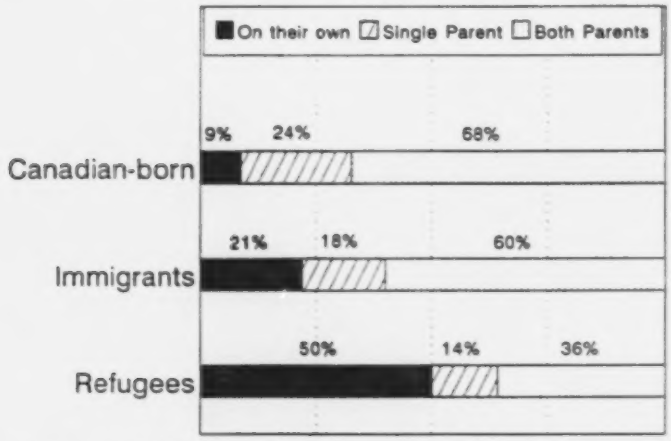
Figure 3: Age distribution by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92)



Parental presence at home

Since many refugees could not leave their home countries with their family, at least half of the refugee students in Toronto's secondary schools reported being on their own. This proportion was more than double that of regular immigrant students (50% versus 21%). The contrast was even greater with respect to Canadian-born students, most of whom (81%) stayed with at least one of their parents. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4: Parental presence at home by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92)

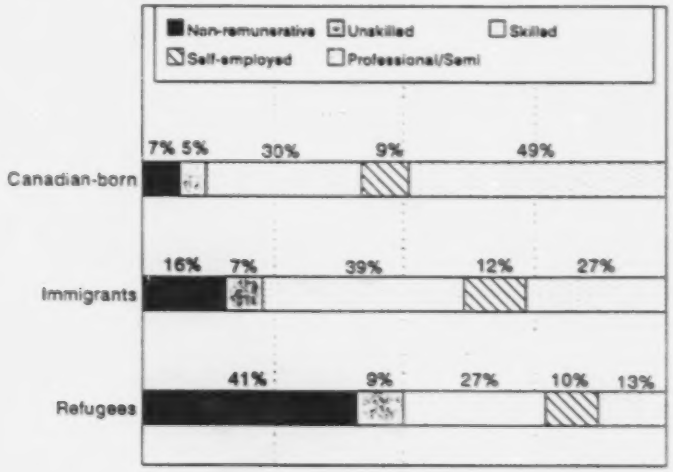


It should also be noted that nearly a third (30%) of the secondary school refugee students who lived on their own were indeed teenagers.

Family socio-economic status

While refugee students who were on their own had to support themselves or rely on government welfare, those who lived with their parent(s) were by no means better off financially. According to the 1991-92 Secondary School Student Survey database, half (50%) of the refugee parents were either unemployed or employed in the unskilled, manual labour sector. In fact, the largest proportion of refugee parents were non-remunerative (40%) - a proportion which was significantly higher than that of the immigrant students (16%) and of the Canadian-born (7%). (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Parents' socio-economic status by residency status (secondary school students, 1991-92)



With this general profile as a backdrop, the next two chapters take a close look at the history, background and early resettlement situations of refugee students.

Chapter 3

Pre-migration and Migration Experiences of Refugee Students

In order to fully assess the current situation and challenges faced by refugee students, it is crucial to have some understanding of their history and background. As will be discussed, not only had their pre-migration and migration plight affected their previous schooling, but it also had important implications for their post-migration adaptation and initial school adjustment in Canada. In this chapter we shall focus on refugee students' **pre-migration** and **migration** experiences and their impact on these students' former schooling.

Pre-migration experiences and former schooling

For the various refugee groups identified in this study, reasons for leaving or fleeing their homeland varied. Yet, for most, the major "push" factor had to do with life-threatening situations and/or discontent with home governments due to unfavourable political, economic, military, safety, or religious conditions. Vivid stories - such as tortures, arrests, executions, homes being bombed, property being confiscated, and young family members being drafted - were portrayed by refugee students and parents. Many had personally witnessed or experienced such trauma under the constant fear of government persecution, civil wars, severe discrimination against and harassment of ethnic minorities, extreme poverty and corruption, or totalitarian regimes. Of course, the degree of trauma and the types of pre-migration experience differed depending on one's home country and individual backgrounds.

Under such life-threatening or war-torn circumstances, it is hard to maintain a "normal" life and stable schooling. Although most refugee students reported that they had formal education before emigration, their schooling was often disrupted by frequent political turmoil or constant travels to seek refuge. (See "Refugees from Sri Lanka", p.17, and "Refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia", p.21.) Furthermore, due to the political and economic situation in such countries as Guatemala and Vietnam, many young refugees from these impoverished countries

had little or no formal schooling *at all*. (See "Refugees from Central America", p.18, and "Refugees from Vietnam", p.20.)

Perhaps, the groups with the least degree of schooling disruption prior to their emigration were those from Iran and China. Without the immediate threat of internal military conflicts, refugee students from these two countries could somehow maintain their formal education until their families embarked on the long and unpredictable migrating journeys. (See "Refugees from Iran" and "Refugees from China", p.19.)

Migration experiences and their effects on schooling

Migration experiences for refugee students were also unique. Unlike most regular immigrants whose emigration process involves planning and a direct move to the destined country, the migration journeys of most refugees were far from being simple and clear. After fleeing from their homeland, often with great risk and/or after several attempts, many either drifted from one neighbouring country to another, or sojourned in a foreign country, which might last from a few months to a few years before reaching their final destination. Morever, the journeys were usually fraught with danger, lengthy periods of instability and painful experiences. In the worst cases, people were confined to refugee camps facing an indefinite period of boredom and uncertainty until they were fortunate enough to be received by a host country.

Because of the long and transitory nature of their escape journeys, schooling for many refugee children and adolescents was further disrupted. Some of the children (Iranians, Ethiopians and Somalis) did report attending school in the transit countries. But this meant new adjustment, learning a new language (e.g. Greek, Italian, German), and sometimes even coping with discrimination from local people; and before long, they moved on to a new place or the final destination where they had to re-adapt themselves to yet another new culture and language. (See "Refugees from Central America", p.18, and "Refugees from Iran", p.19.)

Perhaps the group most affected through their migration process was the ones who had been in refugee camps for an extended period of time. The long refugee camp life was most detrimental for the school-age, especially those who had left their country with little schooling either because of their young age or because of their family situation. For them, a few-year stay in refugee camps meant major gaps, not just interruptions, in education. (See "Refugees from Vietnam", p.20.)

Furthermore, while regular immigrant families could normally plan for their arrival schedule that fit into the school calendar for their children's school entrance, for refugees due to the long and transitory nature of their migration journeys the time of arrival in the destined country was often unpredictable and beyond their control. Hence, it is more common to find refugee students than other students registering in school in the middle of a school year. As will be discussed in a later chapter, failing to start the school year at the same time as others further complicates the school adjustment process for these newcomers both socially and academically.

Refugees from Sri Lanka

Pre-migration experiences

Most Tamil refugees interviewed in this study had undergone life-threatening conditions caused by the chronic civil war in Sri Lanka. As reported by some Tamil families, they were victims caught between the government troops on the one side and Tamil Tiger guerrillas on the other. Virtually all Tamil students interviewed had personally experienced or witnessed such traumatic events as homes being bombed or burnt, property being confiscated, and close family members being drafted, arrested, attacked, tortured, or even killed.

Because of the constant fighting between government troops and Tiger guerrillas, many school-age children sometimes had to stay away from school for one or two months, return to school for a week, and be interrupted again; in some instances, they had to stay at home for one or two years.

Migration experiences

Many Tamil refugees escaped from Sri Lanka by paying private agents, and stayed in a transit country for some time before landing in Canada where they declared their refugee status. But there were Tamils who had stayed in refugee camps, e.g. in India or in Colombo in Sri Lanka, for months until they were finally accepted by a host country.

Refugees from Central America

Pre-migration experiences

Many from Central America were political refugees fleeing for physical safety. Government corruption coupled with extreme poverty or social polarization had politicized people to rebel against existing regimes. For example, it was not uncommon to find those from poor or rural areas in El Salvador and Guatemala who had been involved in or were sympathetic to student movements or anti-government parties. As a result, they themselves, close family members or friends were subjected to government persecution - property being confiscated or destroyed, homes being bombed; or they were under constant fear of being watched, arrested, detained, tortured or even executed.

Because of poverty, some did not have schooling at all. Two Guatemalan students we interviewed described how they had to drop in and out of school because their families were too large and poor to support them. Instead, both had to earn their living at an early age, doing all sorts of odd jobs - washing cars, shining shoes, delivering goods, selling newspapers, etc. Their stories were echoed in a newspaper article on Guatemala's street kids, who worked daily on the city streets to earn a few coins for themselves or their large families, while for them "play and school are low priorities". (Mansour, 1991, July 8).

Some refugees from Nicaragua, however, were from middle-class backgrounds. They left after the rise of the Sandanista Government. Some parents had even participated in the revolution against the former government, but after the revolution they themselves were suspected, watched, or jailed by the new authority.

Migration experiences

Before Central American refugees found their way to Canada, many had gone through dangerous escapes and hard journeys, "hiding by day and moving by night", and walking their way through forests to neighbouring countries (e.g. from Guatemala to Mexico, or from Nicaragua or El Salvador to Honduras), where they sometimes stayed in camps for at least a year, and where they often found themselves in poor living conditions and/or being discriminated against or harassed by local authorities or people.[7]

A young Nicaraguan student left the country with his parents when he was four and stayed in Honduras for three years where he attended school. But as a Nicaraguan, he was harassed by local people and students in Honduras - for example, being pushed off stairs - an experience that was so traumatic that his parents thought their child needed professional help. On the other hand, three Nicaraguan sisters stayed in Costa Rica for two years where they enjoyed their school. These girls also reported that they had adapted to the school system in Canada, and were doing fine at school.

7. See S. Pentland & D. Racicot. (May 1986). Salvadoran refugees in Honduras. Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 5(4), pp.3-5.

Refugees from Iran

Pre-migration experiences

Iranians fled from homes mainly due to dissatisfaction and/or personal conflicts with the regime and its religious ideology. These refugees included those who were well-educated and/or from well-to-do families. For the school-age children, schooling was virtually uninterrupted until their escape from the country.

Migration experiences

While some Iranians left their country legally, many escaped with danger, sometimes after several attempts, to nearby countries where they stayed from a few months to a few years. Usually those who sojourned for a few months escaped to Canada via different routes and declared their refugee status upon landing. But there were also those who before landing in Canada stayed in a transit country (4 out of 14 interviewed), where they applied for Canadian immigration visas or declared their refugee status via the United Nations. These people waited for a year or up to several years until their applications were granted.

Refugees from China

Pre-migration experiences

Many refugees from China could perhaps be considered as economic refugees with the hope of providing better lives and future for their children. Indeed, some young Chinese students reported that they enjoyed their lives and schools in China, did not want to leave, or did not know why they had to leave their country. But in the wake of the June 1989 pro-democracy movement in China, there were Chinese refugees, including those who were well-educated or university students/graduates, who sought political asylum in Canada or other countries.

Migration experiences

Refugee claimants from China came to Canada through different routes. Some entered Canada on visitor's visas, some were travelling to South/Central America, and others had detoured through several countries, especially countries with few diplomatic ties with China, for several months before reaching Canada. Upon their arrival, some stayed in the country without official permits, while others applied for refugee status or permanent resident status. For a short period after the June 1989 Tienamen Square Incident, a significant number of individuals in China as well as those in Canada who sought asylum were accepted by the Canadian government as political refugees.

Refugees from Vietnam

Pre-migration experiences

Those who risked their lives to leave Vietnam in the late 1980's and early 1990s came from different walks of life ranging from fishermen from the northern part of Vietnam to entrepreneurs from the south. Few were from professional backgrounds. The major push for their exodus was their deep discontent or frustration with the new Communist government: lack of freedom, discrimination and harassment of Chinese people by the government, fear of their sons being drafted to fight against neighbouring countries, poor future prospects for the young, and lack of good education for children.

In fact, it was quite common to find children in Vietnam not attending school at all. In some cases, parents, mostly ethnic Chinese, did not want their children to receive Vietnamese education; those who could afford had their children taught at home by private tutors. In other cases, families were too poor to allow their children spend time in school; instead the children had to help out by working as street vendors. Of course, there were those who did attend schools in Vietnam, but their education was often disrupted by their families' constant travels to seek refuge.

Migration experiences

Many escaped from Vietnam via long difficult journeys (mostly by boat), which were fraught with danger from government troops, sea pirates, and natural disasters. Some students and parents had indeed escaped several times, and had been caught and jailed. Those who survived the dangerous journeys landed in one of the neighboring countries - Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines or Hong Kong - and if they were lucky enough they were allowed to stay in refugee camps.

The second phase of their exodus experience began in the refugee camps, where they were confined in poor overcrowded conditions for an indefinite period of time, until the most fortunate ones were accepted by other countries. Aside from crowded, noisy and poor living conditions, these refugees were subjected to long periods of boredom and uncertainty[8] - which often led to frustration and even violence. Most of the students and parents interviewed reported that they had stayed in refugee camps for at least a year, many for two or three years, and some even up to five years. The latter virtually grew up in camps.

In fact, at a secondary school, five out of six Vietnamese students we interviewed had only one or two years of schooling (the most up to primary grades) in their home country prior to their escape; they then spent a few years in refugee camps attending some classes learning English, math and/or Vietnamese.

8. See I. Kaprielian-Churchill. (October 1991). Refugee children in the classroom: Life before Canada. Orbit, pp.2-7.

Refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia

Pre-migration experiences

Students from Ethiopia and Somalia left their homeland due to the plight caused by internal political turmoil, military conflicts, and ongoing drought in their countries. Some Ethiopian students added that their own future was bleak under the political and economic pressure of the military regime. For the Somalis, it was estimated according to a local community that one-fifth of the Somali population has left the country as refugees to Europe, Africa (Ethiopia and Kenya), the United States, and Canada.[9]

Migration experiences

Most moved from country to country, or stayed in a foreign country (e.g. in northern Africa, Europe, India) or refugee camps, from a few months to several years, before finally arriving in Canada either as refugee immigrants (for most Ethiopians) or refugee claimants (for most Somalis).[10]

The anecdotes above clearly demonstrate the point that ***refugee students are different from immigrant students.*** The circumstances they had gone through were rarely experienced by regular immigrants. For instance, ***former schooling for many refugee students was often interrupted or disrupted by the pre-migration situations in their homeland, and by the long and transitory nature of their migration journeys. Furthermore, the trauma many refugee students went through in their home countries and during their exodus had its impact on their emotional well-being even after settling in a new country.*** It is beyond the scope of this report to examine in detail the psychological impact of these students' previous refugee experiences. Nevertheless, their history and background are important factors to bear in mind when one tries to assess and address the academic, social and emotional needs of refugee students. As Meyers (1993) puts it,

> ... the personal, psycho-social responses that each refugee child develops to their particular memories and experiences do not disappear upon their arrival at the door of the school. This emotional and social baggage is carried with them and educators must consider these issues as we learn to deal more effectively with all their needs. (p.4)

---

9. See B.H. Ali. (October 1990). The dilemma of Somali refugees. Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 10(1), p.15.

10. For further information about refugees from Africa, refer to Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 6(4), which is a special issue on refugees and war in Africa.

Chapter 4

Post-migration Experiences: Obstacles to Refugees' Initial Adjustment and Resettlement

After their escapes and long migration journeys, refugees did feel safe, relieved, thankful and hopeful when they finally landed in their destined country. Indeed, many mentioned how grateful they were for the generosity and support provided by the Canadian government, and how much they appreciated their new found freedom. Nevertheless, this sense of relief or gratefulness by no means signified the end of their refugee experience. Rather, it marked the beginning of the third stage of their experience as refugees - i.e. their post-migration or initial resettlement stage. Many of the refugees we interviewed had already passed the initial state of elation and relief, and were undergoing an adjustment process which was often beset with obstacles and difficulties. It was a time when their emotional well-being was far from stable or settled, and feelings of frustration, loneliness, anxiety, worries, and unhappiness often prevailed.

Aside from coping with a whole new language and culture[11] - which all new immigrants have to face and which is never easy even under normal resettlement circumstances - ***refugees were confronted with a host of additional barriers which rendered their adjustment process more complicated and difficult than that of regular immigrants.*** Their obstacles could be categorized as follows:

- o post-traumatic stress and an on-going sense of fear;
- o precarious residency status and endurance of long bureaucratic processes;
- o disintegration of family units;
- o financial difficulties;
- o frequent relocations; and
- o cultural disorientation.

---

11. See Freire, M. (1990). Refugees: ESL and literacy. Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 10(2), 3-6. Also, refer to E. Cole and J.A. Siegel's article (1990), "School psychology in a multicultural community: Responding to children's needs", which has a discussion on cultural adjustment of immigrant families from a psychosocial point of view.

Post-traumatic stress and an on-going sense of fear

A psychological burden that plagued many recently arrived refugees was their post-traumatic stress symptoms and their continuous sense of fear.

- Even though they had finally arrived in a safe country, refugees were still often haunted by their pre-migration and migration plight, as described in the previous chapter. Back in their minds, many still carried with them their traumatic experiences and images. Post-traumatic stress symptoms, which are well documented in literature on refugees (Allodi & Cowgill, 1982), are realities facing many refugee students, although these symptoms may not be obvious to lay persons. During interviews, some refugee students and parents talked about their headache problems, sleeping disturbances, and the need for professional help. (See case studies in later chapters.) Carter and Mok (1992) who surveyed Toronto's refugee children also noted that the most common symptoms among the children and their caregivers were headaches, sleep problems, nightmares, and feelings of fear. About a quarter of the children also cited having difficulties concentrated in school, having tendency to cry frequently, and experiencing depressed/suicidal feelings.

> *A Salvadoran parent reported that his family had constantly been harassed by both government and guerrillas in the home country. He had undergone until recently a long period of fear and anguish, causing sleep problems with nightmares of persecution and killing.*

- Aside from the post-traumatic stress symptoms, there were refugees who were still fearful of their home government, although they were physically away from the country. This was especially so for Central American refugees; they were considerably wary, suspicious, and reserved when approached by outsiders, including teachers or our Spanish-speaking interviewers.[12] Many suspected that they were watched or spied on by secret agencies from their home governments, whom they feared would reach them, get them back, or harm them.

---

12. These Spanish-speaking students, especially parents, were very reluctant to be interviewed at the beginning. They refused to be interviewed on the phone, and home visits had to be arranged instead; yet it was hard to reach them - either no one was at home at the appointed hour, or they simply refused to answer the door. But once the parents or adult students had established rapport with the interviewers, they became very open and talked in greater length than other language groups about their deep problems and grievances - e.g. culture shock, language difficulties, their frustration with school, their demands, their emotional well-being, and their needs for psychological help.

- Often the sense of fear also extended beyond their own personal security to apprehension for family members who were still in the home country where conditions remained unsafe or had deteriorated. Many were deeply worried and concerned about the well being and whereabouts of their close ones left behind - especially in cases where it was difficult to communicate with the home country, or after hearing such news as homes being bombed and destroyed, family members being jailed or killed, or parents being hospitalized. As noted by a few secondary school teachers, it was hard for these students to get their minds off the bad news from far-apart families, and to remain focused on their school work with such lingering thoughts and images.

> *A few secondary school teachers noted: a student missed a term because his sister was killed in his home country; a Somali student had recently lost all his family members in her war-torn homeland; and another student had to leave school and return to Nicaragua.*
>
> *The unpredictable or endangered family situations in their mother countries had made some secondary-school refugee "very depressed", "frustrated and down", "hard to concentrate on anything", or "physically and emotionally tired" - which partly explained for their sleepless nights and their occasional needs to be absent from school or work.*

Precarious status and endurance of long bureauractic processes

In addition to the stress and fear associated with their past and their homeland, refugees also experienced apprehension and uncertainty stemmed from their precarious residency status in the new country.

Most refugees who originated in Vietnam and Ethiopia, and a few from Iran were "refugee immigrants". They were the ones who had stayed in other countries or refugee camps usually for a long period until they were finally accepted through sponsorship by recipient countries as immigrants. For these refugees, once they arrived in the host country, their residency status was no longer an issue of concern.

However, there were other refugees who landed in Canada without any legal documents. They either declared their refugee status upon arrival, or simply stayed in the country illegally.

At the time of our interviews, some of the refugee students or parents, mostly those from Central America and Sri Lanka, had finally obtained their permanent resident status, or were optimistic of getting it in the near future. Nevertheless, there were many others who were still undergoing a long bureaucratic process and legal procedures, waiting for hearings or government decision about their status, despite the fact that some had been in the country for three or four years. This was particularly true of those from Somalia and China.[13] They often lived with anxiety and frustrations caused by the red tape and backlogs of refugee or immigration applications, and by the need to deal with immigration officials who could be perceived as unsympathetic.

> *As noted by a secondary school ESL teacher, "Students have experienced bureaucratic incompetence at all levels. In one case, a student had to commute between Toronto and Montreal because of lost files."*
>
> *According to some principals, refugee parents frequently asked them for a letter of support with the hope that it would give them an edge in immigration hearings.*

Aside from the agony of having to go through a long bureaucratic process, the lack of a formal residency status was also a major source of stress and anxiety for refugee families. Many Chinese, Somali, and some Tamil adult refugees described how worried, insecure and unsettled they were, especially after learning about deportation of other refugees from their own community. A few young refugee students also expressed their related worries that sometimes affected their sleeping habits and sense of well being. Moreover, not only were they unsure of their future stay, but they were also unable to have the sense of security that was essential for one's adjustment to and settlement in a new country. For instance, the lack of an official residency status could have affected these students' normal school lives in terms of (i) school entrance, (ii) parents' link to the school, and (iii) school attendance.

- School entrance: Although the majority of the refugee students sampled in this study did attend school soon after their arrival (which could happen any time of the school year), for some, especially "illegal" immigrants, school entry could be delayed for an

13. Since many Chinese refugee claimants did not fit into the UN definition of refugees, their immigration hearings or government approval of their permanent resident status were still pending, even though they had been in the country for a few years. The only exception were those who came for political asylums in the wake of the June 1989 Tienamen Square Incident, many of whom were granted permanent residency status, although they came later than their earlier counterparts. Shortly after the 1989 Incident, the Immigration Department lowered the acceptance rate again substantially for Chinese refugees, resulting in increasing cases of rejections of the Chinese refugee claims. At least one of the Chinese parents that we interviewed admitted that his application had been rejected by the Immigration Office.

extended period of time. It is true that public schools are supposed to accept all school-age children regardless of their legal status; but the school registration process could be held back due to the lack of proper immigration papers or official documents.

> *A young Tamil girl, who recently joined her parents and brothers in Toronto, was not enroled in school for a few months due to the lack of permission papers from the government. Instead, the girl whiled away her time in the school yard of her brothers' school until she was discovered by the school principal who contacted related government agencies and had the girl finally registered in school.*

While registration delays might be temporary, there was yet another type of delay that lasted longer and could consequently become more damaging. Due to refugees' own fear and/or lack of knowledge about the school system, some thought that they could not enrol themselves or their children in school without a clear status, or others were afraid to do so in fear of exposing their illegal stay.[14] As a result, many of these school-age refugees stayed away from school for a year or up to two years.

> *A number of Chinese students from a secondary school reported that they did not enrol themselves in school for over a year either because they were afraid of disclosing their "illegal" status, or because they were still awaiting for documents from immigration office.*
>
> *In one instance, a 12-year old Chinese boy was not enroled in school for two years until his father finally applied for refugee status. This student lagged far behind his classmates in school work, and did not enjoy school. (For details about this case study, see p.63.)*

- Parents' link to the school: Even if these children were enroled in school, many parents were hesitant to be involved in their children's school activities in fear of revealing their "illegal" or refugee status. They were reluctant to contact school personnel, and were uncomfortable when approached. These patterns of behaviour have been documented by Commins (1992) who discussed the painful lives of refugees:

---

14. Some of these were from China who came before the June 1989 Tienaman Incident. They were the ones who came with their parents or siblings (seldom with the whole family) as visitors, or were en route to South/Central America. Due to the way they entered and stayed in this country, many did not have any legal status, not even refugee status.

> ... precarious legal status as an undocumented worker impeded the family from becoming actively involved in school affairs. The children were uncomfortable with any hint that the school might try to intrude on family life and thereby risk exposing their father to deportation. (Commins, pp.43-44).

- School attendance: Regular school attendance could also be a problem for refugee claimant students. A few secondary school teachers noted that they would not have discovered some of their students' refugee status had the students not been away from school periodically, sometimes up to four or five days, in order to deal with their residency matters with either their lawyers or immigration officials, as far away as Montreal.

Disintegration of family units

Forced family separation was common among refugees. Many, including minors, had to flee their country alone, with siblings only, or with one of their parents; at the same time, other family members remained behind or stayed in some other countries or refugee camps, waiting for their turn to leave. Consequently, it was not surprising to find only about a third of the refugee students in our secondary schools staying with both parents, while approximately 15% were with single parents, and over half were not with any parents at all. (See Figure 4 in Chapter 2, p.12.) The latter either lived by themselves; or the younger ones, the "unaccompanied minors", might stay with relatives or friends.

> *Half of the Tamil students interviewed in this study escaped either with their siblings alone or with one of the parents (usually fathers), while their mothers and/or sisters remained in Sri Lanka. In fact, it was not uncommon to find young Sri Lankan students (11 or 12 years of age) who were sent abroad by their parents through private agents on borrowed money from relatives and friends. Upon their arrival, these unaccompanied minors would then stay with their guardians, who were usually their "uncles" and "aunts".*

Our interviews further indicate that even some of those who reported being with their parents and/or other family members had indeed been on their own until recently as a result of family reunification (e.g. Tamil, Iranian and Ethiopian students).

A number of young Tamil students that were interviewed had finally been able to join their parents and/or brothers who came earlier, or vice versa.

Two young Tamil girls reported having been left behind in a transit country (Germany, India) with relatives - one for half a year and the other for a few years - before uniting with their parents in Canada.

Unfortunately, many could only wish for a future reunion with their families.

A boy from Vietnam had been in Canada for over two years. He did not want to speak too much English because he was afraid that he might forget his own language and be unable to write his mother, who was still in a refugee camp in Hong Kong.

A 12-year-old Chinese boy, who left for Canada with his father, was staying at his uncle's place. He was tired of fighting with his cousins; his only wish was to be able to reunite with his mother, brothers and sisters who remained in China.

Such disintegration of the family unit could have a deep psychological impact on these students and their families. Unlike most Western cultures which value personal autonomy and individualism, refugees from many non-European countries were used to living in groups or extended families with strong familial ties and support. The sudden break of such a close family unit could be particularly traumatic for these young people.

- As discussed before, many refugee students reported being intensely worried and concerned about the fate of their families who remained in the home country. Some adolescent and young adult students even felt sorry and guilty to have left their parents and close ones behind where political violence still persisted while they were in a safe place.

  According to ESL teachers, "Some whose countries are in political turmoil ask themselves if they should be in their country actively fighting for freedom or if they should pursue studies here and return home later."

- Without any direct contact with and emotional support from parents and other family members, many refugee students experienced intense loneliness, sadness or

helplessness in the new country. Single parents who were forced to separate from their spouse and family also reported feeling unsettled, sad and lonely without social supports.

Interestingly, the few Iranian mothers randomly selected for the interview had divorced or separated from their husbands and left Iran with their children. These single mothers reported being lonely, unhappy and depressed in the new country where supports from other family members or relatives were totally lacking. One of the single mothers required psychological help. As far as the children were concerned, they missed their father and friends and wished to see them.

The new reality was even harder on unaccompanied children. Although many of these young students stayed with their "uncles" or "aunts", the latter were often too preoccupied with their own problems and lives to provide the kind of care and attention that is normally afforded by parents.

A young student who left Vietnam with his uncle missed his parents a great deal. In Toronto his uncle worked in a factory for long hours in order to support himself, his nephew and his own children who were still in Vietnam. His wife was killed recently in a car accident in Vietnam; he was disheartened and deeply worried about his own children. Sensing his uncle's situation, the young boy tried to keep to himself and avoid giving his uncle additional burdens or concerns.

Financial difficulties

Unlike most regular immigrants who were financially independent or sufficient (one of the requirements for their immigration application), most refugees left their countries with few or no possessions, and were virtually penniless when they landed in the host country. As refugees, they were not legally allowed to be employed (at least not before the recently announced new refugee policy). Although they were grateful for the welfare support from the government, many hoped for financial independence. There were some who worked with special permits, or as a result of their newly attained permanent resident status; but there were also those who became illegal workers. In below, we shall look at how such financial

circumstances affected those refugee students who were on their own, and those living with parents.

Students living on their own

Refugee students who came on their own had to either rely on student welfare, or work for long hours to support themselves. Although the majority of the identified refugee students did not work (according to the 1991-92 Every Secondary Student Survey database), for those who did the hours were usually long (Table 3) and their jobs were mostly low-paying manual types.

Table 3: Part-time work by students' residency status

Students	% who worked	Among those who worked
Canadian-born	42%	35% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 13)
Immigrant	40%	42% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 15)
Refugee	28%	52% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 17)

A Chinese adult student told how he had to accept any job offered in Chinatown in order to survive.

A university student from Nicaragua, who attended a Toronto adult school, worked long night shifts as a hotel cleaning lady, and worried about being laid-off.

For refugee students who came from middle-class families, for example those from Sri Lanka or Iran, such economic shortage was a burden they were not used to before they left their home country, where all financial needs were met by parents, and where their sole responsibility was education. It was an extra hardship, especially at the beginning, for these students to earn their own living for the first time while learning to adapt to a new country.

An adult student who came from a respected family was a surveyor in Sri Lanka. She reported how hard it was for her to manage the chores (mainly cooking) for a large household of 15 at a place where she first stayed upon her arrival.

Aside from the psychological and physical stress caused by their financial predicament, normal schooling for many of these unaccompanied refugees was also affected. For instance:

- Those who worked juggled long hours of work (as many as 40 hours per week) and the extra time they needed to study and do their homework. (See pp.68-69 for more details about homework.) During interviews, these secondary school students reported how they had to leave school right after class to work until late in the evening and could only attend to their study at midnight. This might explain why these students often showed signs of fatigue in class, and had neither the time nor the inclination to participate in extra-curricular or social activities.

> *A student at a secondary school had left both of his parents in Vietnam. He stayed with his aunt and had to work at her pizza shop every day after school until late in the evening. He also reported that he did not have enough sleep because of the noise from the pizza shop downstairs.*

- Worse still, some had to sacrifice schooling altogether. A few secondary school students we interviewed had to delay their school entry or had to quit school in the middle of a school year in order to earn their living.

> *An Ethiopian student reported that he had to work for two years to meet his basic needs before he could afford the time and money to attend school.*
>
> *An Iranian student worked full-time in a factory for a few months, while attending night school. He only started to enrol in a day school on a part-time basis after he was laid off.*
>
> *An adult student from Vietnam had delayed his school attendance for a year to earn his living, and the student had to drop out again for another year to work.*
>
> *A Guatemalan student would have to quit school if he could take up one or two jobs.*
>
> *A university student from El Salvador had worked in construction but was now unemployed.*

- Prospects for post-secondary education were also slim due to their bleak financial situation. And being refugees, they were ineligible for scholarships (OSAP).

An Iranian student intended to attend George Brown College for computers and English but could not afford the tuition fees, and therefore enroled herself in a secondary school instead.

Students with single or both parents

Most refugee students who were with one or both of their parents did not hold a job. But their family economic condition was far from being secure. In fact, many refugee families were also in a desperate financial state. Because of their refugee status, parents were restricted from working and had to rely on welfare. Carter and Mok (1992) in their recent study also found that the unemployment situation was one of the most unsettling aspects of new refugee families in Toronto.

For those who could work legally, many had a hard time landing a job, or would pick up whatever was available at the time: usually minimum-wage, manual in nature, with long and irregular night hours. And those who were employed illegally had to face additional pressure of being exposed or being exploited.

Fathers of three Central American students interviewed worked in packing or paper factories, and sometimes on night shifts.

The Chinese parents, some of whom were well-educated [15], worked for long hours as manual labourers in restaurants or garment factories.

It was quite common within the Vietnamese community for parents, and sometimes even children, to earn extra dollars by "catching worms" in late evenings till midnight in parks or other open areas, especially after rain. Through agents (which provided transportation for these catchers), the worms were sold for industrial use - e.g. nail polish, cosmetics manufacturing.

The economic situation was particularly tight for growing or single-parent families.[16] The parents, though working, were emotionally unsettled - worrying about rent and their children's education. Single mothers were either on welfare or earned their living through low-paying jobs such as cleaners, and had a hard time maintaining their accommodations and budgets.

---

15. Among these Chinese parents was a nurse, a university student, a doctor, a dentist, and an employee in a government owned enterprise in China.

16. A Tamil father was a security guard having to support his wife and five children; and two other Tamil families were having newborn babies.

Aside from financial difficulties, under-employment or the lack of proper employment was another source of disappointment or depression for those parents who used to be in a high or middle socioeconomic ladder prior to emigration. These parents experienced downward mobility with a sense of shame and frustration.

> *Most Tamil parents were professionals, businessmen or technicians before arriving in Canada. But in the new country, they were either unemployed or underemployed as unskilled labourers (e.g. cleaners, security guards, or gas station attendants), or worked in (food or garment) factories.*
>
> *A mother was a librarian in China, and had not been too eager to give up her secure job and leave the country. As a refugee claimant in Canada, she worked as a cashier in a restaurant for long hours.*

Of course, children were also affected by their families' economic conditions.

- The kinds of related stress, worries and anxiety borne by parents were somehow reflected in the students' wishes. For example, Vietnamese students at one elementary school expressed such wishes as "to help their parents", "to see their parents happy", and "to have more money for the family".

> *A grade 6 girl who arrived recently from Vietnam seemed to do well at school (liked to study), but felt embarrassed to talk about her personal experience. She was not happy because of her family's financial conditions - her parents were sad and worried, and brothers were often fighting.*

- Many parents reported having hard times finding affordable housing. Often the living conditions were substandard and crowded - renting small flats or one/two rooms, or sharing a place with other families. There was a lack of space, privacy, or a quiet place for children to do homework. Some families even had to move frequently from place to place, especially at the beginning, for more affordable accommodations.

- Many refugee families were unable to provide their children with basic needs, not to mention "frivolous extras". Some secondary school students from Vietnam said that they had to receive TTC money from school; others even indicated that their family budget was so tight that they could not afford any lunch, and would like to have free lunch programs if possible. In fact, one of the most important findings of Carter and

Mok's (1992) study in Toronto is the high proportion of refugee families using food banks - "... 75% of refugee children and youth said their families used food banks in comparison with none of the children and youth from immigrant families reported the use of food banks. (p.40)" Furthermore, nearly half of the caregivers they interviewed indicated that their children did not have enough and/or appropriate clothing. In our study, a few elementary-school students further noted that their family financial difficulty had precluded them from participating in extra-curricular activities. According to an elementary school teacher, some families could not even afford the small fees for school trips, and being too embarrassed to tell, the students simply stayed away from school on those days.

- Ironically, these students were particularly thrilled with the field trips organized by their schools. They rarely had the chance to visit new places with their families, as their parents were often too busy with work, short of disposable incomes, and/or unfamiliar with the new country. In other words, many refugee children were deprived of social activities or trips outside school - activities that might be taken for granted by local students.

- Also, since many refugee parents either had to work long hours or were taking up more than one job, their children were often "home alone". These parents seldom had the chance to see or to talk with their children about school, not to say to be involved in their children's school work.

> *A young Vietnamese boy who came to Canada with his mother hardly saw her at home. The mother took two jobs - worked in a garment factory during the day, and caught worms at night till 2:00-3:00 am - and could not even find time to prepare meals for her son. The extra dollars earned were for supporting themselves in Canada and for helping other family members or relatives who were still in Vietnam.*

Frequent relocations

Many of the refugee students interviewed, regardless of origin, reported to have transfered from one school to another within their first or second year in Canada. Very often, refugee families stayed temporarily in reception centres, emergency shelters, hostels, settlement houses, or friends/relatives' places for a few weeks or a month upon their arrival, and then

moved on to another temporary shelters or new accommodations - which were often provisional because of poor conditions, and further relocations were necessary. As a result frequent school transfers were not uncommon among refugee students during their initial resettlement years. A few school principals indeed commented that refugee families tended to enrol their children in school too soon upon their arrival instead of waiting until they settled in as a family.

> *Some teachers witnessed students being asked to leave school in the middle of the school day, with no warning from agencies, because their families had to move to another shelter or location.*

The constant mobility, especially during their first year in Canada, further complicates these children's school adjustment and normal school life.[17] After all, frequent shifts from school to school make it difficult to maintain continuity in programming and bonding with teachers which are essential for optimal learning. A few teachers indeed expressed their frustration about working with newly arrived refugee students from nearby hostels or settlement houses only to find a few weeks later that these students had to move, and the teachers had no further knowledge about the students' schooling. Moreover, being often new to a school especially in the middle of a year, these students were vulnerable or susceptible to becoming victims of discrimination, bullying or racial incidents. Even though some students were able to stay in the same school, frequent family moves from one block of a street to another would still have a destabilizing effect on their regular lives and concentration on school work.

> *A recently arrived family from China was harassed to move out by the landlord who shared the same house. The parents were anxious and hoped to stay so as to avoid further disruptions to their child's schooling.*

Cultural disorientation

Culture shock is common to anyone new to a foreign country. However, the degree of disorientation is likely to be more intense for refugees than for regular immigrants. The latter

17. The Board's Research Department is examining students' school mobility, and its effects on school performance. R.S. Brown's draft report, "Mobility in the Toronto Board: An analysis of student movement and educational outcomes" (Fall, 1994) is part of the on-going effort.

usually have the time and resources to prepare and adjust themselves both financially and psychologically for their destined country, though orientation and adjustment are still inevitable. Refugees, however, usually had to leave their country in a hurry and were often unsure of their final destination. Since they drifted from place to place, they had to cope with whatever conditions facing them. As mentioned earlier, some had to adjust to several different cultures and languages within a few years. It is true that these exposures might strengthen one's resiliency. Yet without adequate preparation for or prior knowledge of the new country, the children as well as their families still had to face immense disorientation at least during the initial stage of their settlement. In fact, some students mentioned that when they first arrived, they were afraid to go out, including to school, or to meet people from other cultures.

> *A number of adult Chinese students described how anxious and worried they were at the beginning because of the new environment and the language problem. They were all alone when they first arrived, and were afraid to go outside Chinatown.*

For newcomers, the presence of relatives, friends or even community settings could serve as important buffers. They are the main source of information and help, and they often act as advocates for them, particularly if English is not their first language. However, for many refugees even such sources of information or social support were lacking. They were by themselves with little or no connection to the community, or had very few relatives and friends to fall back on. This was particularly so among the smaller refugee groups, such as Somalis, Afghanistans and Central Americans. They experienced social isolation. And in schools, it was hard for them to find other students to speak with in their own language. As some elementary school ESL teachers had witnessed, "in the school yard and hallways they often remain aloof and alone."

> *Even among refugees of Chinese origin, a group with a large community, many felt helpless at first with no social connections, no knowledge of the system or government assistance. This was especially true of those who came for political asylum after the Tienamen Square Incident in 1989.*[18] *Fortunately, some of these refugees could eventually turn to their own ethnic community centres, government agencies, or church organizations for help.*

18. According to an interpreter, Chinese refugees who came before were usually economic refugees and had more connections with or support from friends or relatives who had been here earlier. Most of these Chinese refugees were from Canton.

Furthermore, coming from developing or Third World countries, many felt culturally and socially alienated and disoriented in such large urban centres as Toronto.

> *A number of refugee students reported this: the city was too fast-paced and hectic; they felt strange, alienated and tense in public places, e.g. on a bus or subway, where everyone seemed to be in a hurry with their own lives or problems.*

The cold weather was another disorienting factor. Originating in geographically warmer regions, many found it hard to adapt to the extreme cold climate. Some did not even have proper clothes for the cold weather at the beginning. In fact, one of the refugee students reported being hospitalized for some time due to the cold weather.

Homesickness was also intense among refugees. As mentioned earlier, most were uprooted from their native land out of necessity rather than choice. They deeply missed their homeland - especially family, relatives, friends, neighbours, schools, cultures, weather, food, as well as the sense of communal connectedness, familiarity, meaning in life, fulfilment, and recognition - something which could not be easily replicated in a new country (Ishiyama, 1989). In fact, some refugee students we interviewed yearned for a return if the situation allowed.

> *A few Central American refugees pointed out that "their mind and heart are still there [their mother country]". While they found meaning and significance in their homeland, many felt lost and uncertain in their new foreign world.*
>
> *An adult student, who had been very involved in student movements in El Salvador, felt frustrated and lost in the new country - "not sure of his purpose in here, can't find things that make him feel important or worthwhile".*
>
> *A Guatemalan student was uncertain about his own being. He still felt unsettled after leaving his home country for ten years, and failed to have a sense of accomplishment in the new country.*

Some implications

Two points need to be noted. First, not every refugee student encountered the same or all of the above-mentioned obstacles. The severity or the combination of difficulties experienced depended on such factors as the state of their home country, the availability of family or group support, parents' educational background, and their previous refugee experiences. Even students from the same continent or the same country were not homogeneous (e.g. rural versus urban areas). Furthermore, problems faced by young students could be of very different nature from those encountered by their adolescent or adult counterparts, as the students' developmental stage played a role in their adjustment and ability to cope with the past.

Second, although all the obstacles discussed so far were challenges faced by refugee students *outside* school, they had important ramifications on these students' adjustment to their new school lives. For instance, because of their many preoccupations, these students were likely to have a hard time focusing on school work and establishing social relations. And their frustrations at home might even lead to inappropriate and violent behaviours at school. Therefore, ***before one could really appreciate the school needs of refugee students (which are more than the need for ESL development), it is important to have some knowledge of the past and present circumstances these students have gone through outside school.***

Chapter 5

Adjustment and Social Relationships at School

With some understanding of the history and family background of refugee students, we now turn on to how they adjusted to the new school environment, in particular their overall school satisfaction and their social adjustment at school.

Overall school satisfaction

Almost all refugee students being interviewed reported that they enjoyed their schools in Canada. The most frequently cited reasons were:

- teachers were friendly, helpful and understanding;
- the students were impressed by the school facilities and equipment;
- subjects offered were interesting;
- they liked the multicultural atmosphere and cultural activities;
- they had a chance to meet new friends from their own cultural background; and
- they enjoyed the field trips organized by their school.

As discussed earlier, most refugees had very little contact with or exposure to the mainstream society. For many, school was their only link with "Canadian" people and culture. And ***the field trips offered by schools were often their only opportunity to visit new places outside their neighbourhood.***

When asked about their happiest time since arrival, quite a few mentioned the time when they started attending school. Some older students also reported how pleased and gratified they were with the programs and support offered by the school. There were also those who indicated their preference for the school in Canada to that in their home or previous host countries, where disciplines were stricter and teachers were more demanding. Indeed, data

extracted from the Board's 1991-92 Every Secondary Student Survey shows that refugee students in general were less critical of their school than other students.[19]

Nevertheless, their sense of gratitude did not necessarily mean that they faced no obstacles at school. Coming from traumatic circumstances, refugees tended to accept and tolerate conditions that were better than before. Moreover, many recently arrived refugees were too preoccupied with their own settlement needs to be critical of the school. After all, due to their newness to the system they might not be able to articulate the challenges confronting them. However, personal interviews with students, parents and teachers did probe into the problems and difficulties these students had been encountering. In fact, when asked, many reported how hard and overwhelming their experience was, especially at the beginning of their schooling in Canada.

> *Three young Vietnamese students who came recently, reported that for a period of time they were frustrated and unhappy. For some time, one of the girls cried every day when she got home from school.*

The remaining chapter looks at how these students adjusted socially at school - in terms of their school and classroom behaviour, and their relationships with teachers and other students.

Classroom behaviour

Teachers were asked to give their impressions of how refugee students behaved in class. As will be further discussed in Chapter 7, many teachers either did not or could not distinguish between refugee and immigrant students. The general impression they had of ESL students, whether immigrants or refugees, was that the students were shy, withdrawn, quiet and subdued. However, a few teachers noted that refugee students did stand out in certain ways. For instance:

- Some arrived school in the middle of a year with records about their status or background.
- Some were from shelter homes and had to transfer to another school shortly after their enrolment.

---

19. See Cheng, M., Yau, M., & Ziegler, S. (Fall 1993). The every secondary student survey, Part II: Detailed profiles of Toronto's secondary school students. Toronto Board of Education: Research Services (Report # 204), pp. 8-9, 16-17.

- Some had to be absent from school for days to deal with immigration matters.
- A few bore physical scars (bad limps, impaired hearing) from their war-torn homelands.
- In the beginning, many were poorly dressed and shabby - e.g. without socks or proper shoes, or still wearing sandals in winter.
- They often looked pale and fatigued.
- Some manifested unknown social behaviours - e.g. clinging on to objects, and spitting.

> *A few teachers noticed that their Vietnamese students tended to "hold on to things" - e.g. picking up things from garbage cans, playing with empty nail-polish bottles in the classroom.*

- Many also seemed overwhelmed by the school environment and did not know how to react - e.g. failing to follow classroom routines, or being unsure of how to behave in class.

> *According to the teachers from one elementary school, their newly arrived Vietnamese students stood out because of maladaptive behaviours in class - "creating chaos in classrooms", "being aggressive and street-wise", "showing little respect for teachers", "often saying 'No'", "failing to obey rules", "refusing to remain seated or do what the teachers asked", "wandering around in the classroom", "doing their own things", or "shouting across to each other openly".*

Teachers realized that the maladaptive classroom behaviours were more common among the ones with little prior schooling, especially for those who had been in refugee camps for years or who originated in poor rural areas where formal schooling was lacking. These students were not familiar with classroom discipline, nor were they used to staying seated indoors for two or three hours. They had a short attention span, and had a hard time following regular school routines or knowing what to do in class. Absenteeism and truancy were not uncommon, including those at the elementary school level.

Because of their seemingly peculiar behaviours, according to the teachers, these students were not popular among their classmates. In fact, it was reported that when something was missing in the classroom, whether the incidents were real or fabricated, they were the first to be accused by other students, even though no proof could be found. ***Obviously, these students needed support, time and understanding from <u>both</u> the teachers and their peers in order to adjust to a new school life, and to learn a new set of acceptable school behaviours.***

Of course, not all refugee students manifested these traits in school. As mentioned earlier, many teachers failed to distinguish between immigrants and refugees because both groups of students often appeared shy, withdrawn, occasionally confused, nervous, and seldom participated in class. Language barriers and/or cultural differences were important underlying factors for both groups of newcomers. However, teachers who had more experience or interactions with refugee students realized that the reserve of refugees also stemmed from the harsh realities they had gone through before and after their arrival. For instance, those who had experienced life-threatening situations were usually afraid to approach any authorities or institutions. Students from war-torn countries expressed a strong sense of gratitude in much of their communication; those who worried about their families back home carried signs of sadness on their faces; and students whose own or family's legal status was precarious, or whose family situation was desperate usually kept themselves quiet and withdrawn.

More often than not, because of their reticence or low profile, these students remained unnoticed in class, and were often mistakenly assumed to have no special needs other than the need for second language acquisition. But an elementary teacher who had worked for years with students from Vietnam, Sri Lanka and El Salvador noted that ***if these students' psycho-social needs remained undetected or not properly addressed, their withdrawn or passive behaviours could develop into different modes of aggressiveness*** in and out of the classroom. As discussed previously, many of these students had a great deal of frustrations related to their uncertain residency status, their previous refugee experiences, and the social pressure from home (e.g. insecure economic and social conditions) and from school (e.g. coping with the new school environment, or not being able to express themselves in the host language).

> *The modes of aggressiveness ranged from being "frisky" and ready for some fun (making jokes, speaking out), some types of risk taking, to some breaking of rules - e.g. using inappropriate behaviours with other adults in the classroom, physically hurting somebody, tripping or kicking others, being argumentative, or name calling students from other countries.*

Relationship with students

Peer associations

Most refugee students admitted that they tended to associate with peers from their own ethnic background, with whom they felt more comfortable, closer, and more willing to help.

> *According to guidance counsellors, these students could be "highly cohesive and able to give each other a lot of support." For instance, it was reported that Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Kurdish and Bengali students in one school initiated, organized and directed a successful school-wide fund-raising campaign for flood victims.*

Even if they had friends from other cultures, the acquaintances were usually other ESL students rather than English-speaking Canadians. This is especially true of those who arrived recently. They found the former more sympathetic, friendlier, and more helpful probably because of similar backgrounds and level of English proficiency.

On the other hand, English-speaking students seemed to many refugee students more distant, aloof, and to have very different viewpoints. In fact, even regular classroom teachers noticed that local students were not always willing to help, associate or interact with ESL students, especially those who seemed "peculiar" to them. It was thus not surprising that some refugee students talked about their feelings of being alienated, discriminated or rejected by local students.

> *A Chinese student talked about her feeling of alienation. She described local students' attitudes as being inconsistent - sometimes treating her well but in some other time ignoring her.*
>
> *A Vietnamese student from a secondary school commented that Canadian students sometimes despised them with the use of abusive language.*
>
> *A number of Ethiopian students felt being discriminated against because of their colour and origin.*

This feeling of alienation seemed intense for refugees from the more isolated groups such as Central American refugee children, than for those from the larger groups who at least had their

own peers to fall back on. For the former, their loneliness were apparent in the classroom, school yard and hallways. ***It is thus not sufficient just for teachers or other school staff to work with refugee students; other students also need to be sensitized or involved through socialization programs.***

Racial incidents

The majority of elementary school students and a number of secondary school students[20] interviewed (from Vietnam, China, Sri Lanka, Iran and Central America) reported having encountered racial incidents, ranging from verbal abuse (e.g. name-calling, teasing, squabbling, racial slurs, being sworn or cursed at, and being ridiculed or laughed at because they did not understand the language) to physical abuse (e.g. being pushed, pulled, spit at or beaten). The incidents often took place outside the classroom - on the students' way home, or during breaks or lunch in school yards - and were usually provoked by White or Black students as a group, and sometimes also by their own national groups who had been here longer and/or could no longer speak their own mother tongues. According to the students, these incidents occurred most frequently at the time when they were still new to the country and to the school - the time when they had many language difficulties and were unable to defend themselves. Some students had experienced repeated incidents since their arrival.

For many of these newcomers, their reactions were mostly passive avoidance. Instead of defending themselves or taking any actions, they tried to run away and ignore the matter. They were even afraid to complain to teachers or other school staff for fear of retaliation.

> *A Vietnamese boy told his interviewer that he had been spit at and hit by a Canadian boy, but did not report to teachers for fear of getting into further trouble. He was advised by his Vietnamese friend to run away and not to fight back. According to the student, he was harassed because some of his classmates were jealous that their teacher found him a good student.*

20. The cases reported were fewer for secondary school students than for elementary students. In most instances, as reported by five Latino students from an inner city school, instead of being personally involved, they witnessed their friends or others being name-called or bullied at school, who seldom reported to school authorities for fear of retaliation.

A young Tamil student who had been hit again after his complaint said that he was afraid to report his later incidents. Instead he just talked with his parents about the incidents.

Apparently, parents were upset and concerned about the physical safety of their children. Some accompanied their children to and from school to prevent the occurrence of further incidents. Unfortunately, a few students mentioned that they were even reluctant to tell their parents, especially single mothers, whom they feared could not cope with the knowledge that their child was being victimized.

A Tamil interpreter was asked by a school to be involved in a case where a girl was bullied (sat on) and name called by other students. The girl kept the problem to herself because she was afraid that her single mother might not be able to take it. Instead, she tried to defend herself by not making friends with anyone - e.g. being friendly with someone one day, but ignoring the person the next day and turning to someone else. Her teacher inquired about the problem with the help of the interpreter. When the latter finally met and discussed the matter with the girl's family, the girl and the mother were in tears, and the mother wondered why her child was picked on.

A few students who had been in Canada for some time said that they did "yell back" and turn to friends or teachers for help. In response, their teachers discussed the matter in class, stayed after school to make sure students had left, gave detention to the students involved, or even accompanied the victims home. But according to the students, a few days later name calling, fights or bullying activities recurred, and they just had to ignore it.

While such incidents also happened to immigrant or other students, refugees seemed to be more at risk or to be in a weaker position to defend themselves. As mentioned earlier, these incidents usually occurred among the most recent arrivals, especially those who were new to the school in the midst of a school year - the time when they were most vulnerable, when they had many difficulties with English, and when they could be easily intimidated by the locals. Also, coming from what were often repressive circumstances in their home country, these students might be more likely than other immigrants to be silent about or endure these encounters, which might appear "mild" compared to the terror they experienced in their homeland. Furthermore, many refugee students were too preoccupied with their own problems - e.g. their precarious resident status, insecurity, concern for the well-being of family members at home, etc. - to be over-concerned with these matters. But this does not

imply that they were not bothered or impacted. These students' self esteem was probably affected, and they were made to feel different or inferior. Some students might even become aggressors themselves victimizing others, especially their newer counterparts who were in a yet weaker position.

The Board's initiatives such as Anti-racist Education, Conflict Resolution, and Anti-bullying projects may help alleviate the situation. Yet, these newcomers still have to be encouraged and taught to defend themselves and to communicate their needs effectively in school.

Relationship with teachers

Most refugee students being interviewed reported that they were pleased with their teachers. Some found the teachers friendlier and less authoritarian than those in their home countries.[21] However, the positive comments were usually attributed to their ESL teachers, with whom most felt more comfortable than with regular classroom teachers. Compared with the latter, they found ESL teachers usually more approachable, more caring and helpful, and more interested in their cultures, traditions and past. On the other hand, they found it harder to communicate with, follow ("they speak too fast and never repeat"), or approach their regular classroom/subject teachers. Some students further described their regular teachers as distant, indifferent, reserved, and uninterested in them.

> *A young Tamil girl pointed out that while she felt free to ask her ESL teacher questions, in her regular classroom she only checked with her friends and did not dare to turn to her regular class teacher, whom she feared might get upset and reprimand her.*

There were also individual students who described how uneasy they felt about the way their teachers treated them or discriminated against them because of their colour, origin or limited English ability.

---

21. Some Tamil students/parents had these reports: the school gave food and clothing; a student's teacher bought her newborn baby sister a dress.

Some Ethiopian students reported that they were upset that their teachers looked upon them as poor, starved and without a decent life and home.

A few secondary school refugee students reported that some of their regular teachers got upset easily (yelling or hitting tables). They hoped that the teachers could be nicer, more polite, and more patient when they had questions, when they failed to understand or when they had difficulty in completing the assignments.

A Vietnamese student from a secondary school felt that his teachers were not willing to teach him because of his difficulties.

A few Vietnamese students from a secondary school further described how they were hurt by the way their regular teachers treated them: making fun of ESL students to make the class laugh; imitating student's mispronunciation without correcting it; or ignoring them when they tried to express themselves in class.

These students wished their teachers could show more sensitivity to their feelings, listen when they speak instead of ignoring them, answer their questions or talk to them patiently, and encourage them to speak up.

Aside from their teachers, a few students and parents also complained about office staff in some secondary schools as being unfriendly, unwelcoming and sometimes hostile to minority students or parents.

A Latino student from a secondary school felt hurt to be turned away by office staff, who used "too busy" as an excuse when he asked for assistance.

While it is not unlikely that these students were oversensitive to their teachers' or staff's attitudes towards them, their perceptions point to the need for increased sensitivity and empathy among school staff towards these students' feelings and the unique circumstances they had been going through.

Chapter 6

Academic Adjustment and Performance

This chapter looks at how refugee students adjusted and performed academically at school. As a backdrop, we will examine the kinds of programs these students enroled in, and how their program placement matched with their academic level, language proficiency, psychological needs, and aspirations.

Program placement

Program placement for refugee students can be examined in terms of:

- o school-grade placement in relation to their academic level;
- o secondary-school program placement vis-a-vis their post-secondary plans; and
- o placement in ESL versus regular class program as related to their language abilities and psychological needs.

School-grade placement

Questions on school-grade placement in relation to students' ability levels were not included in the interview protocol. Yet, some secondary school students expressed reservations about their appropriate grade level placement. This concern was also voiced by a few parents. While it was not clear to what extent any formal student assessments had been conducted at individual schools, it seemed that most, especially elementary students, were enroled in a grade according to their reported age[22]. This could be problematic for students with wide educational gaps. As discussed earlier, following school routines itself was already a problem for many of these

22. In order to avoid their children from being drafted for military service by the government, some refugee families underreported their children's real age in official papers.

students; coping with the academic level of other students of their age was even a greater challenge. It was not surprising to find many of these students lagging behind their peers in school. A few parents or guardians indeed expressed their wish that the school would do something about it by either allowing their children to remain in a lower grade, or offering special programs to help their children establish the foundation for education.

On the other hand, some secondary-school refugee students complained that they were being held back by having to repeat grade(s) or courses which they had already taken in their home country.

> *A number of Iranian students complained that they were being placed at the same or lower level than the one they had completed in their mother country. For instance, a student finished grade 7 when he left Iran, and was placed at the same grade level when he enroled in an elementary school in Toronto.*
>
> *A secondary-school Iranian student was not happy to be placed at grade 9/10. He completed grade 11 in Iran and escaped to Pakistan for two years, where he attended English classes before coming to Canada. He felt he was <u>not</u> benefiting from his math and English courses, and planned to study grade 11 math on his own and be examined independently.*
>
> *Another Iranian student from the same secondary school was a first-year university student in Iran.*

Since not all interviewed parents or students voiced their opinion on the issue, it is hard to determine how common and widespread this discrepancy between placement and learning abilities was among refugee students. Yet, these unsolicited complaints might point to ***the need for the school system and individual schools to develop more holistic assessment and placement procedures for refugee students, whose educational backgrounds were often less predictable and more fragmented than those of other immigrant students.***

Part of the solution to this problem may be found in the services offered by the two reception welcoming centres - Bickford and Greenwood - established by the Toronto Board of Education in the late 1980's. The major functions of the Centres are to offer reception, as well assessment and placement for ESL students and families recently arrived from other countries. However, only a few of the refugee students and parents we interviewed had availed themselves of the services provided by these two Centres. Most refugee students either arrived in Canada before the existence of these centres, or were simply unaware of the service. (In the next chapter, we shall discuss the functions and perceived effectiveness of the Centres in greater detail.)

Program level, post-secondary school plans and aspirations

With regard to program placement at the secondary school level, less than two-thirds (63%) of the refugee students were enroled in Advanced Level programs, as compared to about three-quarters among other foreign-born and Canadian-born students.[23] In fact, a further breakdown of the data shows that some refugee groups lagged far behind. As illustrated in Figure 6, except for Iranians (82%), the proportion of various refugee groups enroled in Advanced Level courses was lower than the general population (75%) - e.g. newcomers who were born in Sri Lanka (72%), China (63%), Vietnam (62%), Ethiopia (60%) and Somalia (55%). Indeed, those from Central America, the majority of whom from El Salvador, had less than half (46%) of their students enroled in Advanced Level programs.

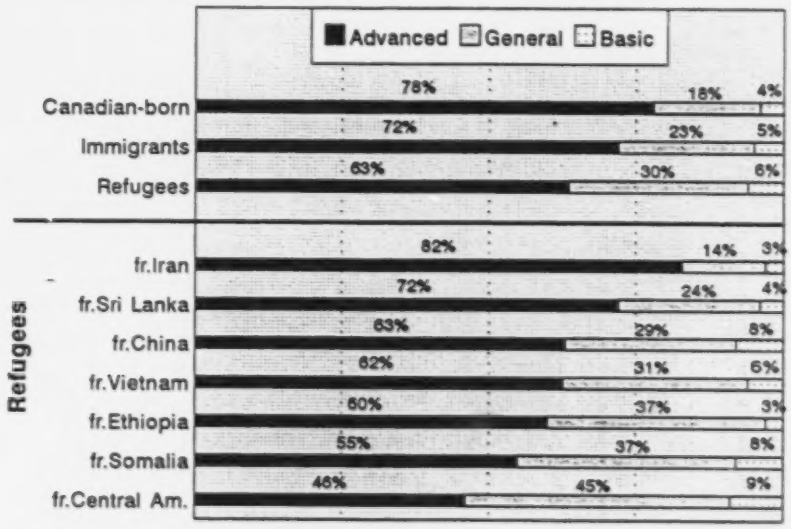


Figure 6: Program Level by students' residency status

How did these program enrolment patterns match with the students' aspirations and post-secondary school plans? According to the 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey database, the group with the highest aspiration in terms of pursuing further academic or professional education were those from Iran (71%), followed by those from Sri Lanka (54%)[24] and China (53%). But other groups had less than half of their students with such aspirations - Somalis

23. These data were extracted from the 1991-92 Every Secondary Student Survey database.

24. It is interesting to note that this percentage was less dramatic than the impression gained from interviews with Tamil students. Tamil students seemed to be the group with most definite and clear professional goals, even among those at the elementary school level, when many other elementary-school refugee students did not yet have any clear career goals.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Ethiopians (37%)[25], those from Vietnam (36%), and those from Central America (33%). (See Figure 7.) In fact, the latter two groups had a significant percentage being *unsure* of their post-secondary school plans - 32% among those from Vietnam, and 29% among those from Central America, as compared to 19% among the general population.

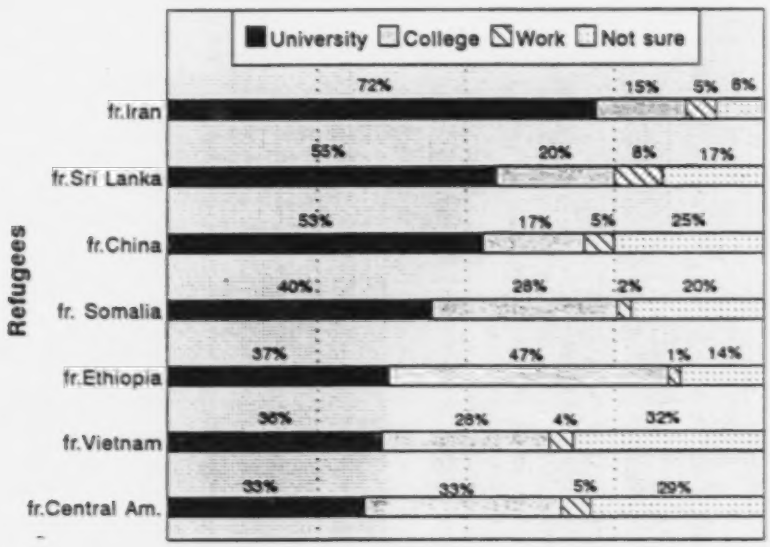


Figure 7: Post-secondary school plans of refugee students

This profile, to a certain extent, confirms our interview findings that more students from Iran, Sri Lanka and China had professional goals such as engineering, accounting, medicine, and science, than those from Central America and Vietnam. In fact, among the students we interviewed, only half of the Central American students, and only slightly over a third of the secondary school students from Vietnam aspired to pursue higher education or professional training. Most students from Vietnam either mentioned specific trades (e.g. silversmith, motor mechanics) or were uncertain of their career goals.

Overall, the aspiration level of refugee students as a group was lower than that of other immigrant or Canadian-born students. (See Figure 8.)

25. Again, for the Ethiopian and Somali students, the percentage who planned to go on to university as derived from the 1991 every secondary student survey dataset was lower than the impression gathered from the interviews. The latter indicate that many of these East African students had career aspirations especially in the field of science and health care (medicine, dentistry, nursing).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

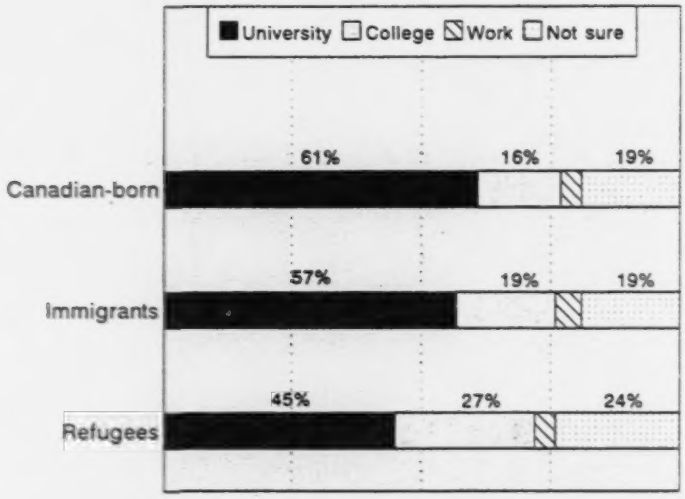


Figure 8: Post-secondary school plans by students' residency status

Unfortunately, even among those refugee students who intended to go on to university, almost 20% were enroled in a stream (General or Basic program) that would not lead to their goals, as compared to only seven percent of other immigrant students and five percent of Canadian-born students. (See Figure 9.) This kind of mismatch between aspirations and program enrolment, and misinformation about the system was most salient among those from Central America (40%), Somalia (32%), and Ethiopia (21%), followed by those from China (20%), Sri Lanka (18%), and Vietnam (15%).[26]

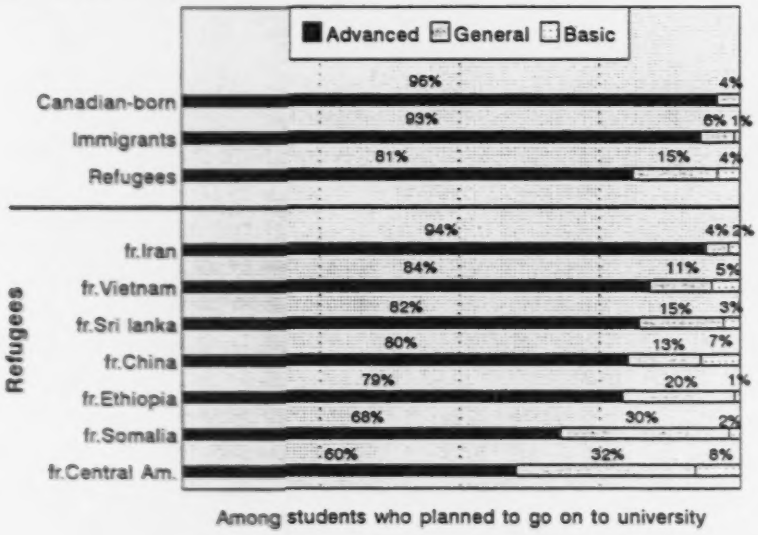


Figure 9: Students' aspirations and program placement

26. The only group which seemed to have the least discrepancy was the Iranians (6%), whose aspiration level and proportion in Advanced Level program were indeed higher than those among the general population.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The incongruence between post-secondary school plans and program enrolment among such a high proportion of refugee students indicates their high degree of ***unfamiliarity with the school system***. According to some secondary school teachers, these students often asked them about course credits and requirements for graduation or post-secondary education. Guidance counsellors also noted that these students did not understand where they fit in the system, lacked understanding of the school system and its requirements (e.g. credit system, credit equivalences, or summer school options), and were overwhelmed by the large amount of information given to them. According to the guidance counsellors, ***extra time is needed to explain to these students "how they fit into the system, and what their next steps should or might be."***

The lack of familiarity with the school system in general was also common among elementary-school refugee students. For example, a student who arrived in 1990 from El Salvador said that he liked coming to school, but did not know much about it - for example, the school library, the available extra-curricular activities, and other resources.

Placement in ESL versus regular class programs

Virtually all refugee students reported attending or having attended ESL classes either on a full-time or a part-time withdrawal basis at their schools. There were also adolescents from China, Vietnam, Iran and Ethiopia who reported having attended special ESL classes or special ESL secondary schools, such as Greenwood School, offered by the Board for a year or so before enroling in their current secondary schools.

Most refugee students, especially recent arrivals, were pleased with their ESL class or school. They found it easier in such a setting to get help and attention from teachers, to practise their English, to feel comfortable and confident to speak up, and to ask questions or express themselves. And those who had attended Greenwood School said that they enjoyed the program and missed the school a great deal. They also noted that the program was helpful in assisting them adjust to the mainstream school system.

Of course, not all refugees held the same perception of their ESL program. Those who had some English ability or who had been here for some time wished to receive more intensive language instruction in such areas as grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, pronunciation, and essay writing. And to a few who had been in the system longer or were at a more advanced stage of their English skills, ESL classes seemed inadequate. According to these students, such programs limited their ability to work harder, and to improve the English language

because of the lack of opportunity to socialize with local students. Instead, they wanted to attend regular classes on a full-time basis.

Nevertheless, ***for most refugee students, ESL classes did serve their language needs at least in the early period following their arrival. But more importantly, such settings played an instrumental role in addressing the psychological needs of these students during their initial school adjustment stage***, as many had the social and emotional need to be with their own group of students, where they could feel more comfortable with others who shared their backgrounds and/or difficulties. This need also applies to regular immigrant or foreign students whose first language is other than English. For refugee students, however, especially those from traumatized backgrounds (war-torn countries or refugee camps), the need was even more critical, as they required extra time to recover psychologically from past trauma. As Freire writes (1990),

> For refugees, early attendance to ESL and literacy programs may offer the opportunity to be in an environment that they perceive as holding, soothing and nurturing. There they can identify with others in similar situations. Learning may not take place initially (or may be minimal). But this early experience may be of tremendous value in helping refugees to regain some of "the self", with learning taking place later on. (p.5)

While the importance of ESL programs for refugee students cannot be overemphasized, ***the role of regular classes should not be overlooked*** either. Although refugee students in general favoured ESL classes, further conversations with the students and their parents reveal that many had mixed feelings about ESL versus regular classes. As mentioned earlier, on one hand, they wanted special language help in an environment where the language skills of other students were about the same, and where teachers were more accommodating and understanding. But on the other hand, they did not want to be isolated or labelled as second-class. They wanted to integrate into regular programs where there were more students, a wider variety of subjects offered, more opportunities to learn different things, and where they could feel more important. This is especially true for those with some English ability or for those who had been here for some time. Some, including parents, worried that too many periods of ESL classes would preclude them from other subject areas.[27] However, the dilemma was that many of these students did feel stressed and overwhelmed in the regular class, where they encountered difficulties in terms of understanding teachers' instruction, participating in class, coping with regular subjects, or communicating and developing a rapport

---

27. Yet these students were still keen to improve their English. For instance, although a mother would like her daughter to skip the ESL class in order to concentrate on other subjects, she had her daughter attend ESL evening classes.

with their teachers and other students. Let us turn to some of the academic challenges recent refugee students encountered in the regular classroom.

Classroom challenges facing refugee students

Individual interviews with refugee students and parents offered insights into the students' daily classroom performance and the kinds of obstacles confronting them in class. The majority of refugee students, regardless of language background, admitted being overwhelmed in their regular class, especially in the beginning. Seven major obstacles were identified.

Undoubtedly, first and foremost was their *limited ability in English* (Obstacle I), which affected their school performance in terms of:

- understanding teacher instruction: Students from Vietnam, China and Central America found their regular class/subject teachers talking or teaching too fast to follow.

- class participation - Failing to actively participate in class was common among refugees, including those who did not have too much difficulty in understanding instruction.

- doing in-class assignments: To write an essay within a class period, for example, could be a strain for many of these new students. Because of their language difficulties, they needed more time and aids such as a dictionary, and it was hard for them to complete their work during class time.

- coping with regular subjects - especially courses that require frequent reading, writing and open discussions: Even subjects such as math and science, which some refugee students were strong at or had taken before in their home countries, could become a challenge because of the different medium of communication.

Obviously, the degree of language difficulty varied according to the students' English proficiency level. For instance, students from Vietnam, China, and Central America were more likely to report such difficulties in class than refugee students from Sri Lanka, Iran, Ethiopia and Somalia due to their different level of prior exposure to the language. Many students from the latter countries had either studied English as a subject or learnt the language on their own before coming to Canada, though they too admitted having difficulty in pronunciation, accents and fluency. These students were also more likely than other refugee

students to report that they understood instructions, participated in class, and asked teachers for clarification when necessary.

Aside from the linguistic difficulty in comprehending and expressing themselves, the language barrier could also pose a *psychological barrier* (Obstacle II), discouraging the students from participating openly and freely in class. For instance, many of these students said that they wanted to speak up as other students did, but they were often overcome by apprehension, shyness and embarrassment caused by their communication difficulties:

- they felt embarrassed that they did not understand the instructions or questions clearly in the first place, and were uneasy about asking their teachers or someone to repeat what was said;

- they were afraid that their accent, mispronunciation or lack of fluency would draw unwanted or negative attention from other students or teachers.

This psychological obstacle of course could either be reduced or exacerbated depending on *the attitude of the teacher and other students* (Obstacle III). Some Tamil, Latino and Vietnamese students, especially those who had been here longer, said that they had tried and would like to participate more actively, but had held back after a few trials. They were frustrated and felt put down, uneasy, or depressed because they sensed that their teachers or other students did not have the patience to listen to them, to understand their questions, or to pay attention to them when they could not express themselves fluently.

> *Two Salvadoran adult students reported being shy and uneasy in regular class because they could not communicate properly. They did not always understand teachers' instruction in class and felt embarrassed to ask their teachers. They usually turned to classmates or resolved problems on their own. One student even felt that some teachers did not care if students understood, and were not willing to explain or repeat.*

There was yet another factor underlying these students' inhibition in class, and that was their *previous school system and home culture* (Obstacle IV). Many students from countries like Sri Lanka, China and Ethiopia had such high respect for or even fear of teachers that they were hesitant to approach the latter for questions. They did not "want to bother a teacher or appear demanding because this is considered impolite." Moreover, in their cultures, group concerns take priority over individual rights. They would find it inappropriate or uncomfortable to ask

questions during class time thinking it would hold back or interrupt others. In fact, there were complaints that their Canadian counterparts asked too many trivial or irrelevant questions in class which slowed down the teaching of the "real" lessons. Although some refugee students did eventually turn to their teachers for help, they preferred to do it after class - for example during lunch time or after school.

Participating in open discussion was also something new and intimidating for many of these students. Coming from school systems that were teacher-centered, where teachers were the holders of knowledge and students were the recipients, these students were not used to questioning or expressing their opinions openly in class. Even if they wanted to, they were extremely cautious, and would only speak up when they were sure of the answers, for fear of embarrassment or insults. That is why many felt overwhelmed with the local teaching and learning methods which emphasized free discussions and team work.

Instead of becoming active learners, the students attended their class quietly, turned to their friends for assistance, or tried to guess or find out answers on their own. This accounted in part for their low profile and withdrawn image. Some, especially secondary school students, might even skip classes in order to avoid such uncomfortable and stressful situations. Hence, ***the fact that these students kept to themselves should not be taken as a sign of complacency; rather it should be understood as an indication that pro-active measures need to be taken by the school and teachers to ensure that appropriate attention, care, understanding and interventions are given to these students, even when they <u>seem</u> complacent.***

It is true that the above difficulties and obstacles were also shared by other immigrant students, who as well needed time to acquire a second language, or to adjust to the new educational system. But for many refugees, the difficulties were further compounded by their pre-migration and migration experiences as refugees. (See Chapter 3.) For instance, education or schooling was frequently interrupted or disrupted before and during their migration resulting in *<u>wide educational gaps</u>* (Obstacle V) for many school-age children or young adult refugees. These students lacked basic learning skills or concepts; they virtually had to start from scratch, and thus had more barriers to overcome than other students. As some teachers noted, refugee students' progress depended on their former education. If they had a solid foundation in education, even with initial language problems, they could manage eventually; but for those with large gaps in education, it was hard to cope at the secondary school level.

These problems were exacerbated by the *age factor* (Obstacle VI). Those arriving at a younger age would at least have the time to acquire the language and basic learning skills during their formative years. But for those who came as adolescents, academic gaps were more difficult to overcome. Without special interventions to develop their learning skills, these students' educational gaps remained unfilled.

Perhaps the best example to illustrate the impact of wide educational gaps and the age factor are the Vietnamese refugee students. Among the latter, those who were more capable of managing their school work were the ones who had relatively little gap in schooling prior to their emigration, or those who had been in the Canadian school system for some years beginning at the primary or junior level.

> *Of the six students from Vietnam that we interviewed in an elementary school, the only one who seemed to be doing quite well (e.g. attending regular English class) was a young boy who had been in the Canadian school system for three years.*
>
> *At a secondary school, only a handful of Vietnamese students interviewed felt comfortable in regular classes. One of these students attended two years of elementary school in Canada. The other finished grade 9 in Vietnam before he was sent abroad by his parents who hoped to give their son a chance to attend university - a chance which was denied in Vietnam because the father was a soldier under the previous regime.*

On the other hand, those who came at a later age and with wide educational gaps tended to manifest greater difficulties in coping academically at school.

> *Even though a Vietnamese girl had been at a secondary school for three years and would like to participate in class, she still felt too intimidated to do so. This student had been in refugee camps for more than three years and finished only grade 2 when she left Vietnam.*
>
> *Another two secondary school students from Vietnam reported being behind, especially in math, and seldom spoke up in class, though they had been in Canada since the late 1980s. Both had wide education gaps - one left Vietnam when he was at grade 2 and the other at grade 4. Their parents were fishermen and boat builders in the northern part of Vietnam. These two students had attended two different schools before enroling in the current one.*

Some adolescents and young adults from Central America, especially those from impoverished regions, also experienced serious learning difficulties due to the lack of formal schooling prior to their arrival.

> *Two adult students from Guatemala admitted having learning difficulties. Both had little schooling before arriving in Canada, and had stayed in Mexico and then the United States for quite an extended period of time. Though they would like to be educated, they reckoned their lack of both English and learning skills had hindered their progress. While they turned to their teacher (who they said was very patient in explaining) for assistance, they sometimes still did not understand the teacher's explanation due to their limited English. And they did not dare to go back for the second or third time for fear of upsetting their teachers. One said that even after checking with the teachers he forgot everything soon after. This student indeed felt uncomfortable, unwilling to go to school, and had been absent frequently. He found it difficult to study and had decided to find a job and forget about the diploma. The other student admitted that his illiteracy, even in his own language, hampered his learning of English. But this student was more determined to finish secondary school, and would like to have hands-on training in a trade.*

Finally, refugee students' *post-migration experiences* (Obstacle VII) also posed hindrance to their school adjustment and concentration. As discussed in Chapter 4, these obstacles included their precarious immigration status, continuous fear and concerns for family members in home country, family disintegration, financial hardship, late enrolment in school, frequent relocations, and cultural dislocation. A good case to illustrate the point can be found among students from China. Compared with some other refugee groups, Chinese refugee students had undergone relatively stable pre-migration conditions with little or no interruption in their formal education prior to their flee. (See Chapter 3 for details.) Some Chinese students even mentioned having more intensive schooling and more pressure from teachers in their home country. This might partially explain for their relatively high level of school achievement. Yet, for some Chinese refugee students, schooling was affected by their delayed enrolment at school due to their uncertain residency status. (See the case study below.)

A young student from China was 12 when he was interviewed. He was physically big but was very shy and reluctant to talk. He finished grade 2 when he left China in 1988 with his father. They arrived in Canada on visitor visas, and remained in Toronto after their visas expired. Without any formal status, not even refugee status, the father did not enrol his son in school. Instead, the boy stayed at his uncle's home for almost two years, whiling away his time by watching Chinese TV programs.

When he finally attended a Toronto public school, probably after his father had applied for refugee status, he was placed at grade 5 according to his age. Although he was at grade 6 at the time of the interview, he was very behind in his school work, performing below standard, and had great difficulties with English. His uncle wished that his nephew would be allowed to repeat a grade or be given special help to acquire basic skills.

The student himself indicated that he did not like to attend school, nor did he like his teachers too much. (He was the only interviewed student who said so.) He was beaten several times by local students, but never reported the incidents to his teachers nor to his father.

At home, he usually watched Chinese TV, which he enjoyed most, or sometimes played with his younger cousin who also helped with his school work. But the frequent fights and quarrels among or with his elder cousins bothered him. He seldom spent time with his father who was busy making a living. He wished his mother and siblings who were still in China could join him in Canada.

School achievement

While the above case studies capture the types of academic difficulties experienced by some refugee students, the 1991-92 Secondary School Student Survey database supplements these findings by providing a snapshot of the *overall* performance of refugee students. Figure 10 shows the academic achievement of refugee students vis-a-vis that of other students.[28] *As a whole*, refugee students were more or less at par with other immigrant or Canadian-born students academically, though their at-risk rate was slightly higher (30% versus 25%).[29]

28. It should be noted that not much can be said about the achievement level of elementary school students due to the lack of assessment data available for elementary students, not to say refugee students, at the time of data collection.

29. It should be noted that this overall at-risk rate for refugee students may be an underestimate, as it only captures those refugee students who enroled in school at the beginning of the school year as other students. Those who enroled later in the year, as happened more often among refugees than other students, were not reflected in the figure. An internal study by the Research Department of the Board notes some preliminary

However, a further disaggregation of the data indicates that certain refugee groups lagged far behind and became the most at-risk students in the system. As shown in Figure 10, on one hand, recently arrived secondary school students from China not only fared better than other refugee groups, but also outperformed the general population in average school marks. The performance pattern of those newcomers from Iran, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka was similar to that of the general population. On the other hand, a large proportion of newcomers from Ethiopia, Somalia and Central America were at a high risk of dropping out of secondary school (between 40% and 50% chance versus 25% at the system level).

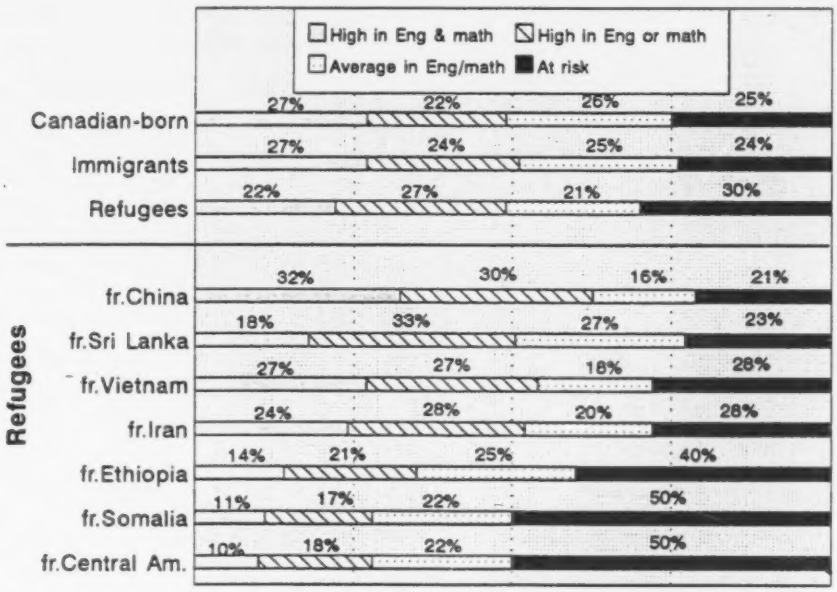


Figure 10: School achievement by residency status

Our interview data confirm the above findings. For instance, we had Tamil parents or students reporting that they were keen on their study, and liked their school subjects; some had been identified as gifted or awarded for their essay writing, and also most found math easy and did very well in it. On the other hand, the majority of secondary-school Latino students interviewed indicated that they were not doing well at school or had learning difficulties. Some even mentioned that they felt like giving up many times.

---

indications that students who enroled later in a school year were more likely to be at risk than those who started their school year in September.

A Nicaraguan refugee boy escaped to Honduras, where he and his parents stayed for three years. The boy was harassed by local people there - an experience that was so traumatic that his parents thought he needed professional help. The student had attended several schools in Toronto due to relocations, and admitted that his school marks were low, and that he neither liked nor understood history and math even after tutoring sessions. He wished he could leave school soon, and become a movie star in future.

According to his father, his son had not been paying enough attention to his school work, and English was still a problem though he had been in Canada for over three years. The student reported that his parents helped with his school work and talked with him about school very often. But the son wished that his parents would not interfere with his life. The father, on the other hand, was frustrated by his inability to help his son because of his limited English, though he and his wife were well educated.

A Nicaraguan teenager joined her father in Canada in 1989, after being apart from each other for seven or eight years. She was unhappy at home - crying, wandering around, and having a poor relationship with her stepmother. She wished that her natural mother who was still in Nicaragua could join her. She had a chronic headache problem and was on medication and therapy.

According to the student, because of her unhappiness at home, she did not feel well physically and could not concentrate on her school work, though she wished to study harder. She had difficulty in science and math, and said that the teacher talked too fast and was hard to follow. According to her father, the student's main problem was language.

It also seemed that the student's home life had affected her relationships with school peers. She had no close friends at school, and always maintained distant and defensive relationships with other students. She had been name-called and stereotyped with racist and sexist remarks, but she defended herself openly and verbally, and complained to teachers.

A refugee student from El Salvador also reported having headache problems which required treatment. She worked after school in a day care centre looking after babies, and often got tired after work. Though she had been in Canada since 1988, she was still unsure of her and family's residency status.

The girl also worried about her school performance. Although she liked math and science back in El Salvador, she said that the standard there was lower, and that she had great difficulty in these two subjects in school. She participated and understood instruction in ESL class, but in regular class she was too shy to speak up and only understood instruction somewhat. She felt bad when she forgot things or had difficulty with her assignments. Nobody, except a girl friend from Nicaragua, could help her at home, although her mother often asked her about school. She admitted that her shyness and limited English, albeit improving, were her main obstacles. She was very nervous when her teacher stood around while she was doing her work such as typing. The girl hoped to finish high school with good marks, and wished to be a lawyer.

While further research is necessary to explain the performance differences among the different subgroups, as discussed earlier, part of the variance could be attributable to the students' previous schooling, their pre-migration situations, the length and nature of their migration process, and their post-migration experiences. ***It is thus crucial for teachers to be aware of and understand their students' backgrounds and situations that might have accounted for their school performance.***

Nevertheless, there were also refugees who came from war-torn or traumatic situations and were able to adjust to school eventually. Further investigations indicated that part of the performance variances might stem from the way these students and/or their families themselves coped with the situation - in terms of their motivation and aspiration, homework, and parental support. Indeed, coming from cultural and educational environments that were different from Canada's, many refugee students and parents did not expect the school system to accommodate their needs; rather they deemed it their responsibility to resolve their own problems. That is why, even if some students had problems understanding school work, they would turn to their friends or siblings for solutions instead of approaching their teachers for help.

Motivation and aspiration

Although refugees left their homelands mainly for political reasons or for physical safety and freedom, certain groups had a definite single-minded goal to start a new life in a new country

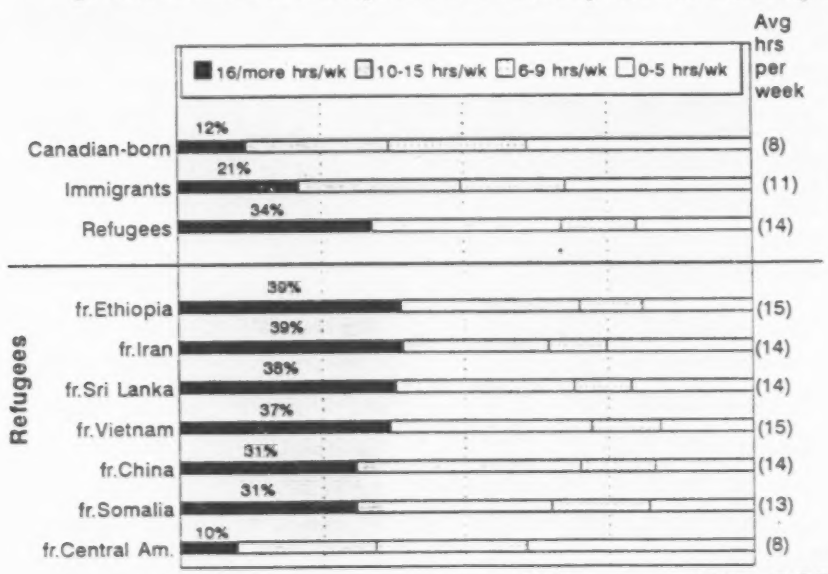
and to provide a better education and future for their children. For instance, most Tamil students - elementary or secondary - indicated in their interviews that their immediate wish was to study hard and do well in school, and that they came here "not for fun or enjoyment". Moreover, Tamil students, including the younger ones, stood out as the group with most definite and clear professional goals.

On the other hand, there were refugee students who were less certain of their future. Some of these students were so politically committed to or involved with in their home countries that, at least for some time they could not find in Canada the same type of meaning or significance they attached to their homelands. This was true of many Central American youths, whose hearts and souls were still in their mother countries, to which they yearned to return. These students might need more time and support to get settled in their new country before actual learning could take place.

Homework

In general, refugee students spent a greater amount of time on homework than other students. The data from the 1991-92 Secondary Student Survey show that, except for students from Central America, the proportion of students who spent 16 or more hours per week on homework was much higher among refugee students (34%) than among regular immigrant students (21%) or the Canadian-born (12%). (See Figure 11 for a breakdown by country of origin, and the average hours spent on homework per week.)

Figure 11: Amount of time spent on homework by students' residency status



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It should, however, be noted that while refugee students in general spent more hours on homework, many of them also had to juggle their study time with part-time work. As discussed in Chapter 4, although not all refugee students held a job, for those who did, working hours were often long (an average of 17 hours per week versus 13 hours for the Canadian-born). (See Table 3, p.31.) Indeed, certain refugee groups, especially those from Ethiopia, Somalia and Central America, had the majority of their students holding part-time jobs, and spent as many as 20 hours per week on their work. Many of these students also tended to be academically at risk. (See Figure 10, p.64.)

Table 4: Part-time work of different refugee groups

Refugee students	% who worked	Among those who worked
from China	37%	46% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 16)
from Sri Lanka	24%	53% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 18)
from Vietnam	23%	43% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 15)
from Iran	27%	38% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 14)
from Ethiopia	39%	71% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 20)
from Somalia	24%	62% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 19)
from Central Am.	22%	65% worked for 16 hrs. or more per week. (Average hrs. = 20)

Parental and family support

Chapter 4 discussed how family separation due to escape affected unaccompanied refugee students financially, emotionally, and educationally. Below, we shall look at the type of parental support for those who were fortunate enough to be with at least one of their parents.

There was a general view among school staff that refugee parents were not too involved in their children's education, and that they were hard to reach. For instance, it was not uncommon to find a very low participation rate among refugee parents in school meetings, school functions/activities, or sometimes even teacher-parent conferences or interviews. It is quite understandable that because of their unique circumstances, it was hard for these parents to be closely involved in their children's school life. For instance, their minimal contact with their children's schools could be attributed to:

- language difficulties - many parents were intimidated by the linguistic barriers they faced in the mainly English-speaking environment of the schools.

- cultural perception of the school role - in many communities, the school was seen as a formal and foreign institution; parents were reluctant to initiate communication, and they did not see it as their place to question the school's authority or interfere the school.

- preoccupations with the intense process of adaptation and adjustment to the new country, including long work hours - many parents struggled to meet basic needs such as shelter and employment, and lacked the time for meetings during the day or in the evening (if they worked night shifts).

- unwillingness to approach or contact public authorities due to precarious immigration status - as discussed earlier, refugee parents were fearful about their tentative legal status and tried to minimize contact with authority figures.

However, ***parents' inability to link with the school system should not be interpreted as a general lack of interest in their children's education.*** Most of the parents interviewed expressed their concerns for their children's education. Indeed when asked about their wishes, many wanted a good education and a better future for their younger generation, which, they added, was one of the reasons for leaving their home country. Also, while they generally failed to maintain a close tie with their children's school, many refugee parents, including the elder siblings, were involved at home by either talking and/or helping with their children/siblings about school and school work. Some parents even expressed their frustrations for not being able to be as helpful as they wanted to. Of course, the degree of home support varied, depending on the parents' own educational background and social circumstances. The following boxes describe the different roles parents of various refugee groups played in their children's education, and some of the factors behind their level of involvement.

In general, parents from Iran and Sri Lanka were actively involved in their children's school work. Despite their financial difficulties, precarious status and frustrations, these parents or guardians were very concerned about their children's education. All seemed to be well informed of their children's progress by talking regularly with their children about school; by making efforts to keep in touch with school through parent interviews; by helping with their children's school work; and for a few by making suggestions to their children's teachers.[30] If parents' assistance was unavailable either because they could not help or they were not living in Canada, some Tamil students reported getting help from their siblings, uncles or aunts, and in one case, even a private tutor.

The parents' strong support or involvement had partly to do with their (i) own educational background (e.g. most of the Sri Lankan parents we interviewed reported being adequate in English and were well educated as indicated by their former occupations), and (ii) their single-minded goal of providing good education for their children, which was believed to be the sole avenue to future success.[31]

Among the Chinese students interviewed, half reported having talked with their parents about school often or sometimes, but the other half seldom or never for reasons such as parents were too busy or not home.

Some parents, because of their own language difficulties[32] and the lack of time, were unable to assist in their children's school work. Instead, their children were assisted by older siblings, cousins, or friends, and others were without help at all.

But there were Chinese refugee parents who paid close attention to their children's education by, for example, taking their children to library, buying books for them, maintaining contact with teachers about the children's school performance.

---

30. For example, a Tamil parent suggested that teachers should work closely with parents in helping their children with language difficulties. An Iranian mother complained to the teachers that she was not too satisfied with the way math was taught at school.

31. See Seevaratnam's article (199?), Counselling immigrants is more than words.

32. Many parents know very little English, and some were attending evening ESL classes themselves.

Among Ethiopian students, those living with parents or guardians often talked about school at home.[33]

While parents from Vietnam had general concerns for their children's education, futures, and peer influence, most failed to be actively involved both at school and at home. Many students from Vietnam said that they seldom talked with their parents about school, or rarely received help with their homework. For those who did get some assistance, it was mainly from their elder siblings or friends.

The generally low involvement among Vietnam-born parents might be due to their lack of time (often busy or not at home), lack of proficiency in English, and lack of understanding of the school system (especially when some of the parents themselves did not have formal schooling)[34]*. Furthermore, as two Vietnamese interpreters pointed out, parents were not sure of their expected role in their child's school life; they did not know how to get involved, or how to help with their children's school work. In fact, since parents themselves often felt insecure (because of their lack of knowledge in the language, the system, etc.), they could not give their children the sense of security needed for normal school adjustment. Rather, their children had to help with some family matters or take up some adult roles, e.g. answering telephone calls, dealing with family's documents and forms, taking care of the younger ones, etc.*

Teachers also noticed that some Vietnamese students were disrespectful to their parents who complained that they were unable to manage their children at home. A teacher also noted that some of these children seldom stayed in one place; rather they moved from one relatives' or friends' family to another every few weeks.

Another teacher reported this: One of her Vietnamese students was polite but failed to do any work. She found it hard to get through to him even with the help of another Vietnamese boy as interpreter. She tried to reach his parents. Repeated notes or letters were asked to be taken home, but were never brought back. It was not until the involvement of the school principal and a social worker who made a home visit did things begin to happen. It was also not until then that the teacher realized the student's home situation - broken family (marriage problem), the child was abused and had some health problems. Since then there were more contacts through the social worker, and the mother finally came to school for the first time.

---

33. Unfortunately, the few Ethiopian parents interviewed did not elaborate much on the topic. At the time of the study, there were very few Somali students who arrived in Canada with their parents or families. Therefore, not much can be said about their parental involvement.

34. Many of the parents interviewed in one school were either laborers, fishermen, market vendors, and seamstresses in Vietnam.

Interestingly, all Central American students we interviewed reported that they often talked about school with their parents or other family members, and that they had their parents or elder siblings help with their school work at home. Two fathers expressed their frustration and the obstacles that prevented them from being as involved as they wanted to. One was frustrated that he could not help much because of English. The other father was dissatisfied with the fact that the school did not provide them with enough translated materials about the school system, programs, activities, and the type of help or support available.[35]

As a Spanish-speaking interpreter pointed out, the degree of concern and involvement also depended on their parents' educational background and family situations. For instance, he found a Salvadoran student from an elementary school who missed a lot of school with different excuses, and her parents seldom intervened.

Obviously, those with active home support would be more able to overcome their obstacles. Yet, despite their desires and efforts, there were limits to what these parents could accomplish in light of their language difficulties and their preoccupations with the intense process of adaptation as refugees. Moreover, because of their lack of familiarity and contact with the school system, these parents were often confused about the role expected of them by the school, and how they could assist their children's education. ***Hence, it would not be effective merely for the students or their families themselves to cope with and adjust to the school system without the active outreach and input from the school itself.*** In the following chapters, we shall examine how schools and their staff members had responded to the situation, and what should be done at the classroom, school and system levels in order to address the multidimensional needs of refugee students that have been discussed so far in the report.

35. For instance, the father complained that there was no interpreter in the school when he registered his son. It only happened that a tradesman was around and helped to translate.

Chapter 7

Staff Responses to Refugee Students

Thus far, we have examined various aspects of refugee students - their profiles, history, background, initial settlement experiences, as well as their adjustment and performance at school. This chapter attempts to look at the refugee issue from the staff perspective: that is, how school personnel, the schools themselves and the system as a whole have responded to the inflow of refugee students in recent years.

In order to understand how school staff coped with the situation, members of the Refugee Research Advisory Team (formed for this study) conducted 14 focus group interviews with the following professional and paraprofessional groups:

- regular classroom teachers (7 focus groups - between 5 and 6 teachers from each of the seven sampled schools);
- ESL teachers (2 focus groups - one for the elementary panel, and the other for the secondary);
- guidance counsellors;
- social workers;
- psycho-educational consultants;
- school community advisors; and
- reception welcoming workers.

For a snapshot of how individual schools dealt with the incoming refugee students, each member of the Advisory Team also visited one of the sampled schools to observe their Local School Team (LST) meetings. The principals of the schools were also interviewed about their school efforts and programs. And for a cursory look at what the system itself has done with regard to refugee students, some of the Board's public documents - including special work group reports, Board minutes, Standard Procedures, and public correspondence - were examined.

Staff awareness and attitudes

School staff in general were aware of the increasing cultural diversity of Toronto's student population in recent years, and of the growing number of refugee students in their schools. However, other than this general perception, very few staffs had any clear idea *who* their refugee students were, or *how many* they had in their class or school. This comment was common among school administrators, teachers and student support staff. Yet, the degree of staff awareness of and their attitudes towards the refugee issue varied a great deal among individual staff members, ranging from those who did not think that refugee students should be identified, singled out and dealt with to those who believed that these students had their distinct needs and required special attention. This variation in opinions seemed to be the result of a combination of factors: the types of responsibility the staff had; the number of refugee students they had to deal with; the kinds of interactions the staff had with these students; the degree of emphasis the school placed on the issue; and the staff's personal viewpoints.

Regular classroom / subject teachers

Perceptions of refugee students

Among the various school professional groups interviewed for this study, regular classroom/subject teachers had the most diverse views about the issue. One may broadly divide these teachers' opinions into two general types. The first was those who found it *in*appropriate to identify individual students' background and history because they believed that it was the student's private or personal matter. Furthermore, they did not see any pedagogic reasons for "labelling" or identifying students' immigration status and background. For them, all students should be treated the same way. This group of teachers made up the majority of elementary school teachers, and about half of the secondary teachers we interviewed.

A minority of elementary teachers and half of the secondary school teachers interviewed, on the other hand, believed that refugee students were different from other regular students. They were more concerned about the issue, and made deliberate attempts to understand their individual students' background through one-on-one conversations, class discussions or journal writing. They found it important to know what refugee students had gone through because they reckoned that the experiences and needs of these students were unique and serious enough to require staff attention and interventions. The slightly higher proportion of secondary

teachers than elementary teachers in this group might be due to the higher proportion of refugee students at secondary schools.[36]

Actions taken by regular teachers

Of course, those who were not aware of their refugee students or who did not think it was appropriate to identify students' immigration background, did not believe that there should be any special ways of dealing with refugee students. There were, however, other teachers who pointed out that they had to modify their conventional classroom strategies in response to the needs of immigrant and refugee students.

For instance, in teaching, some teachers said that they had to supplement their regular oral instruction with more written instructions, demonstrations, visual illustrations, or special tutoring to help their ESL students understand.

> *A subject teacher spent a portion of his class time on teaching or correcting his refugee students' grammar and sentence structure.*
>
> *A math teacher used his after-class time (lunch hour) to re-teach a small group of Vietnamese students, practically word by word, with a dictionary. He realized that such efforts did pay off.*

Another strategy employed by some teachers was peer support. Students were teamed or paired with other students who had been here longer and spoke the new students' language. They believed that such teaming effort would facilitate the adjustment process of new ESL students who might feel less confident with their regular classroom /subject teachers. A few teachers also designated an English-speaking student to be the caretaker of the new student, especially in cases where it was difficult to find a co-national as partner or interpreter (e.g. for Argentine students). As well, in one of the sampled secondary schools where student tutorial assistant program was available, those with study problems were referred to peer tutors who were usually the more senior students of the same or similar ethnic/language background.

---

36. Morever, in two of the secondary schools studied, one had a long history of accepting refugee students because of the settlement buildings nearby, and the other school was an adult school with a large population of adult immigrant and refugee students. The latter school had made efforts to recognize the needs of refugee students through the school newspaper, announcements, or talks at staff meetings (e.g. by a Vietnamese social worker about Vietnam, and the escapes and hardships experienced by refugees).

Some teachers would also depend on bilingual support staff, especially social workers who spoke the language(s) to help them understand their students, and, more importantly, link them with students' families whom they found difficult to reach - for example, interpreting during parent interviews, calling parents to return school forms, and making home visits. Sometimes, when bilingual social workers were unavailable, a few teachers turned to other staff members who happened to speak the students' languages as resource or contact persons with parents - e.g. a Chinese school nurse, a Cantonese-speaking educational assistant, and international language instructors.

While most of the above strategies were ways of helping students with their school work, a handful of teachers took a step further by making special efforts to ensure that these new students would feel welcome and be part of the class. For instance:

- some of the teachers showed their interest in the students' background by initiating conversations with them individually, especially with those who just arrived in Canada.

- students were asked to write about their home countries and traditions as part of the class work or activities.

- a few subject teachers had even tried to integrate these students' cultural background and experiences into part of the classroom learning activities - e.g. through journals, class discussion, building a "community spirit" among Canadian and non-Canadian students - in order to make students feel free to support or to confide in one another.

> *In a business class, an Iranian adult student had to be away for Ramadan. The teacher had the student talk about the practice with his classmates. According to the teacher, it provided a valuable learning opportunity for students to share each others' cultural experiences and traditions.*

These teachers maintained that the above activities did not take too much of the class time. Furthermore, not only was it a learning experience for all, but it also encouraged refugee students who might be very shy at the beginning to speak up, and made them more comfortable to share their experiences. It is true that such class activities or dialogues might not help much in reducing the many difficulties faced by refugee students; but according to the teachers, these students at least learned that teachers and their fellow students were concerned about them.

Challenges facing regular teachers

Teachers in general admitted that they had difficulties in dealing with the inflow of refugee students. First, they found it difficult to offer as much individual or special attention to students as they would like to since they had to deal with a class with diverse needs and a wide range of English and academic levels.[37] As guidance counsellors point out, "there is a limit to what regular teachers can do regarding refugees.... Support staff felt that teachers are under a tremendous amount of stress because the needs of the student population are sometimes insurmountable and are changing frequently. They work as best they can."

More importantly, teachers admitted that despite their daily contacts with refugee students, they had little knowledge of the students' backgrounds and of how to deal with the situation. After all, they had neither information nor training in this area. For instance, some teachers reported that because of the language barrier, they could not understand some of the students' attitudes or reasons for acting in certain ways, such as being oblivious to classroom routines, school rules or teachers' orders. Many regular classroom/subject teachers indeed admitted that they were *not* equipped to handle the situation, especially when refugee students were brought into their classrooms in the middle of a school year without prior warnings or information about the students' history and abilities.[38]

Obviously, teachers alone could not handle the situation without the support and assistance of other staff and the school.

ESL teachers

Perceptions of refugee students

The majority of ESL teachers that we interviewed from both the elementary and the secondary panels expressed their awareness of and great concern for refugee students.[39] Many ESL

---

37. See Canadian Teachers' Federation. (1992). Immigrant and refugee children in the classroom: A survey of teacher training needs. Toronto: LRS Training & Education.

38. According to some of these teachers, refugee students should be in ESL reception classes or centres such as Greenwood, instead of being placed in their classrooms.

39. Yet it still seemed that those from the secondary panel were more aware of the issue than their elementary counterparts probably due to the higher visibility of refugee population (both in terms of number and the kinds of obstacles facing them) at secondary schools than at elementary schools. Also, this might have to do with the fact that older students, especially adults, are more able to communicate their status; "refugee" may not be a word young children use. Therefore, while some of the ESL representatives from the elementary panel knew who their refugee students were, many others said that they made no distinction between refugees and immigrants. On the other hand, ESL teachers from secondary schools were more conscious of refugee students and their difficulties.

teachers played an active role in integrating refugee students. Since virtually all these students were placed in ESL programs either on a partial or a full-time basis, ESL teachers had greater opportunities to interact with them, and were thus more knowledgeable than other teachers about their situations and needs.

Actions taken by ESL teachers

While addressing the language needs of the students was the primary service of ESL staff, many of these individual teachers had taken on additional roles in their class. For instance, aside from reading and writing instruction, some ESL teachers made it an opportunity for students to share and learn each other's cultural background and experiences.

> *An ESL teacher designed her class in such a way that all students knew about each other's countries, what was going on, and their experiences - by, for example, asking students to bring newspapers into class for discussion.*

There were also occasions when ESL teachers found themselves counselling these students, referring them to different sources for help, or even providing them with assistance out of school.

> *Some ESL teachers reported helping refugee students address the "red tape" by writing letters on their behalf, or talking with government officials and immigration counsellors. And if there were money problems, the teachers contacted student welfare workers and assisted students in filling out forms. A few teachers even gave students money to "tide them over", even though they realized it was a stopgap measure only.*

As some guidance counsellors put it, ESL teachers "tend to see the whole student instead of only paying attention to language needs, ... [and therefore] have a better sense of the balance of student needs."

Outside their classrooms, ESL teachers acted as advocates for these students. They saw themselves playing an important role in linking these students with regular teachers - by, for example, helping regular classroom/subject teachers understand the difficulties these individual students had in school (e.g. why homework was not done), and/or working with regular teachers in their classrooms to support students. They also made connections with the guidance staff, bilingual social workers, and psychologists. As well, ESL teachers sometimes

sat on the Local School Team bringing forward these students' names for discussion, or providing consultation and acting as a resource offering both ideas and materials. In some schools, ESL teachers were also actively involved in co-ordinating special programs or services such as:

- setting up a drop-in centre for students and teachers to communicate, and share experiences;
- organizing field trips for students to learn directly about Canadian culture; and
- developing a buddy system to connect new students with those who have been acclimatized.

Challenges facing ESL teachers

Again, despite the multifaceted assistance they offered to these students, ESL teachers also found themselves working under constraints.

- o First, they did not feel knowledgeable enough or qualified to counsel students. "They could be a teacher and a friend, but not a therapist nor a qualified career counsellor." Some ESL teachers felt that they should not be the ones who filled all the gaps; other professionals should be involved in the areas that they were trained for.
- o Second, ESL teachers felt that resources for their programming were limited - e.g. a lack of space for ESL classes; classes being held in basements without windows; having to share space with another program which limited an active oral program; shortage of budget to acquire updated or suitable materials even with the growing enrolment of new students.
- o Third, they felt that they had little control over their own programs. As one ESL teacher commented, "Principals and school staffing committees have too much control over ESL staff." In fact, some ESL teachers were afraid that they would just become "translators of texts and materials used in the regular classroom, modifiers of material to a Grade 1 or 2 level, or supporters of classroom assignments, and could not get on with their own program."

Student support staff

Perceptions

School support staff include various professional and paraprofessional groups such as guidance counsellors, social workers, psycho-educational consultants, special education staff, welcoming/reception workers, and school community advisors. As a whole, these support staff seemed to have some sense of the difficulties and challenges faced by refugee students, and they generally recognized that these students had needs that warranted special attention from school staff. Their cognizance might be due to the fact that when students with refugee background were referred to them, these individual students' backgrounds and difficulties would surface during discussions. In fact, of the five support groups interviewed, three offered direct services to refugee students. They were guidance counsellors, bilingual social workers, and welcoming/reception workers.

Guidance counsellors

Services

The most direct way in which guidance counsellors had the opportunity to interact with these students was through their one-on-one counselling with the students in terms of placement, explaining credits, helping with timetabling, or making referrals to other resources. There were also occasions when the guidance office worked as a team with teachers, administrators, and others in the school to offer special information sessions or programs. While most of these activities were meant for a larger audience, immigrant and particularly refugee students seemed to be the group to have benefited most.

Samples of orientation programs organized by the guidance counsellors include:

- *inviting Immigration officials to talk to students about the immigration process;*
- *offering such seminars as "The Ontario System" from elementary level to university, "Maturity Credits" seminar, or seminars about applying to college/university;*
- *holding Options Fair about availability of courses and programs in school;*
- *preparing charts showing subject by subject progression, with OSIS requisites and recommended English/ESL levels;*
- *showing staff pictures and information on the school's bulletin board to familiarize new students with their teachers and other school staff; and*
- *inviting adult counsellors or teaching staff from universities and colleges to talk to and connect with students in order to prepare them for post-secondary institutions.*

Challenges facing guidance counsellors

Guidance counsellors also admitted facing limitations in dealing with refugee students. First, they found it difficult to design services for these students without knowing who the students were. At the same time, guidance counsellors felt that they could not be experts on all of the refugee needs, especially those with severe problems such as financial needs. As one guidance counsellor put it: "sometimes I feel like I'm just another bureaucratic roadblock saying 'no'". While they knew they should act as a referral source, they often did not have enough information about specific resources (e.g. finances, regulations about work and immigration, status issues, and ethnic community links) to which they could refer students.

Guidance counsellors also saw the need for professional development for themselves and other staff:

- to better understand these students - the immediate background of students and the political situation of their home countries, culture, customs, values, and educational systems in different countries;

- to find ways of dealing with different situations - e.g. how to communicate with students with little English language skill; how to deal with a situation where there is

conflict/tension in a classroom between two people or different ethnic groups - "they often don't know why or what to do about it"; and

- to obtain information on appropriate resources for referring students.

Social workers

Services

Among the various groups of student support staff, social workers - especially those who were multicultural/multi-lingual - were the most frequently referred to group by the school staff when help was needed with regard to refugee students' "outside" issues. For instance, they were often called upon to make connections with families, to counsel students in school, and to deal with outside-school issues such as housing, health care, family counselling, financial problems, and access to outside resources and agencies. In a few schools, bilingual social workers were sometimes invited to conduct information sessions either for refugee students or school staff (during PD days or at staff meetings). According to many teachers and other support staff, the services of these bilingual social workers were very much valued.

> *"The multicultural social worker is really useful, knows how to solve problems (e.g., day-care, housing) and helps guide students through the system" (Guidance counsellors).*
>
> *"Multi-lingual workers are involved both with consultation services and with direct services. Feedback from parents and from school teams highlight their value as support staff" (Psycho-educational consultants).*

Challenges facing social workers

School staff wanted more access to multi-lingual services, and would like to see an improvement in the present deployment and availability of bilingual social work staff, especially for certain language groups such as Tamil, Somali, Ethiopian, and Vietnamese. Social workers themselves felt that the lack of resources made it difficult to provide needed supports.

Welcoming/reception workers

Services

The intake/welcome workers of the Board's two Welcoming/Reception Centres - Greenwood and Bickford - were usually the front line for new refugee students and their families, offering the latter reception, counselling/referral, assessment and placement services usually in the clients' own language. According to the welcome workers interviewed, approximately two-thirds of their clients were refugees referred by welfare agencies and community service agencies. Their clients, mostly adults with families, requested placement in the schools for their children as well as for themselves, as they generally could not find jobs.

These Centres also dealt with refugee students who had registered directly at the school but were later referred to them when problems arose. According to the welcome workers, "students who come to the Reception Centres first and are then placed in schools seem to adjust better, knowing there is someone there who speaks their language, and often return to the Centre for support." In fact, the intake/welcome workers often had to deal with refugees' emotional problems. Many refugee adults were relieved to find someone who spoke their language; they often told their stories of loneliness, difficulties, and frustration. In fact, the few parents interviewed who had availed themselves of these Centres' services agreed that the reception/welcoming staff had been very helpful.

Challenges facing welcoming/reception workers

While these welcoming/reception workers were handling a large caseload mostly referred by external agencies, they also sensed a lack of awareness or usage of their services by school staff within the system. This is especially true of elementary school teachers, who generally were not aware of the centres. Only two of the elementary school teachers we interviewed mentioned the Greenwood Centre. One teacher who was very concerned about refugee students noticed that some of his students were sent to his school by the Centre. This teacher also turned to the Centre for help in assessing his grade 8 refugee students with regard to their secondary school placement. Another elementary school teacher received for the first time an information package from the Greenwood Centre for a new student. Although the information was not extensive, it helped the teacher understand the background of his refugee student who did not have the English language skills to talk about herself. Among the secondary school staff interviewed, again only a few ESL teachers were aware that their refugee students came from these reception centres. This was made clear only after the ESL teachers reviewed the

students' records (OSR) in the Guidance office. One teacher noted that in general the Bickford Centre's assessment was helpful, but on several occasions the Centre misplaced students at a level higher than where s/he thought they should be.

Psycho-educational consultants

Services

Most of the psycho-educational consultants being interviewed from the seven sampled schools seldom dealt with refugee students directly. Instead, they provided indirect services such as consultations with teachers who worked with refugee students. This was done either as part of the Local School Team discussions or when consulting with individual teachers about their classes. Some provided professional development sessions for teachers and parents.

Challenges facing psycho-educational consultants

These consultants indicated that they would like to be involved more actively and directly with refugee students. Given refugee students' multifaceted problems (including mental health issues), consultants believed their knowledge and skills could be of great value to the teachers, students and parents. However, they also realized that there were constraints. First, they had to deal with the language barrier of refugee students. Second, psycho-educational consultants voiced frustration about the lack of time to focus on prevention work with new immigrants and refugee students due to the demands for their services in general. Thirdly, these consultants also admitted that they did not have enough information about refugee students to understand their needs fully. They too would like to have professional development on the topic of refugee students. "You have to link with them as a consultant. You should not over or under react given the information they share with you".

Special education teachers

Usually, special education teachers were not involved with refugee students partly because refugee students were older, and were ineligible for special education; and partly because their disabilities might be masked or misunderstood due to the lack of English proficiency. Therefore, for most special education teachers, their contributions were mainly suggestions offered at the Local School Teams. However, some special education teachers interviewed did offer extra help in homeroom classes.

A secondary school had an open-door policy which offered students with weak literacy and numeracy skills one-on-one assistance.

Realizing the special needs of adults, a special education department head built time into the schedule so that the students could access the service without an IPRC.

A special education assistant ran two noon-hour conversation classes per week for ESL students.

School community advisors (S.C.A.s)

Of the eight S.C.A. workers interviewed, only three had had direct contact with refugee students. According to these S.C.A.'s, they had not been considered part of the support group of the school, and had seldom been called upon by school staff for help. They felt ***their services being underutilized***.

Some common challenges facing various staff groups

Having reviewed the different nature and degree of involvement of various teaching and school support staff, one may notice that they all shared some common difficulties in terms of:

- identifying refugee students,
- the general lack of information and training about refugee students,
- reaching parents and involving them in their children's schooling process, and
- limited resources, including limited access to bilingual staff.

That is why, despite the individual efforts and initiatives which were beneficial to refugee students, most staff did not think they were ready or were equipped to meet refugee student needs. With this in mind, let us look at how individual schools and the system as a whole dealt with the issue of refugee students.

School responses and initiatives

Overall school responses

Since Local School Teams (LSTs) were supposed to be a school-based, multi-disciplinary vehicle to serve the needs of local students,[40] observations of such school team meetings could shed some light on individual schools' standpoint with regard to refugee students. As mentioned earlier, each member of the Refugee Advisory Team was delegated to one of the sampled schools to conduct an observation of the LST meeting. An analysis of their observational notes concluded that ***the issue of refugee students was not yet articulated or defined at the school level.***

For instance, the data showed that in none of the schools had there been a team meeting at which problems of refugees, as a group, were discussed. In some cases, team members felt that any discussion of students as group members, as opposed to individuals, would be inappropriate. In other cases, while there was no philosophical objection to discussing students in groups, the practice was rare. Even in an elementary school where one of the team meetings was set each school term for planning global prevention programs, refugee students had never been a focus of discussion. Morever, some felt that to do so would be treating students unequally.

Even when individual refugee students happened to be discussed at team meetings, their refugee status virtually never entered into the discussion. This suggests that team members did not consider refugee status as relevant or important to the discussion of an individual student referred to team. In fact, it was commonly believed that refugee needs would be the same as or very similar to those of other non-English speaking immigrants: i.e. needs for reception classes, ESL assistance, or help getting over the "culture shock". Therefore, it was not surprising to find a lack of systematic efforts in dealing with the issue specifically.

Some effective school initiatives

Nonetheless, some of the sampled schools did initiate, aside from the existing ESL or after-school heritage language programs, special services for ESL students. Although none of these initiatives were specifically designed for refugee students, they seemed to have beneficial effects for them.

---

40. For more information about the Toronto Board's LST functions, refer to Cole, E.; Siegel, J.; & Yau, M. (1990). The Local School Team: Goals, roles and functions.

Reception classes

There were a few elementary schools that offered reception classes for new ESL students, many of whom were indeed refugees. Some schools placed these students in a reception class for a short period of time before enroling them in regular and/or ESL programs. Other schools had students attend a reception program for half a day and their regular grade in the afternoon. When the students were ready, they would return to their full regular or ESL program. In either arrangement, the reception program was designed to provide a small class/group setting (10-14 students), where these new students could get more individual attention and help at the beginning - e.g. initial orientation and introduction to school, basic English, or even life skills. These classes were also flexible enough to allow students to stay for a short period of time, depending on their individual needs. Schools which received students from refugee hostels, for example, found such a setting more accommodating for refugee students and more facilitating for classroom teachers than immediate placement in regular classes.

Integrated international/heritage language programs

A fully integrated international/heritage language program was offered at one of the schools visited. Although it was not designed for refugee students as such, it benefited many of them. First, with the availability of international/heritage language instructors during regular school hours, these instructors could play a more direct and effective role than after-school instructors. They acted as a liaison between the new students and classroom teachers, and assisted the students in class in their own language. As well, the integrated international/ heritage language classes were used at this school as part of the reception for the newly-arrived from the refugee hostels. The students were placed in the heritage programs full-time for a week or two for initial support in the first language and culture familiar to the students before transferring to a reception class, and finally to a regular class. Some ESL teachers noted that students from smaller refugee groups, e.g. Central Americans, who were more isolated and lonely than other groups in school, could benefit most from such a setup, where the students could feel more secure and comfortable during their initial adjustment period. In addition, the international/heritage language staff in this school had played an active role in initiating programs for assisting new ESL students. For example, with the endorsement of the school administration and the support of a community centre, they organized after-school tutorial classes to help new students integrate into the Canadian school system.

A school-wide ESL policy with a cross-disciplinary approach

A secondary school offered ESL transition courses (e.g. for 5 months) specially designed to meet the language needs of specific subject areas, such as science - to help students who were in need prepare for regular academic courses.

Other local school efforts include:

- providing school or classroom libraries with books in the students' first language;
- permitting students to read/write in their own language in class if necessary; having first language tutors in class; and encouraging students to write even with only a few words in English.
- team teaching between regular teachers and ESL teachers, instead of withdrawing students to ESL class. According to the teachers involved, the students seemed to learn quickly, to speak up and participate actively, and to feel much happier.
- offering in-class individual conferencing on a one-on-one basis.
- scheduling "Reception Afternoons" every six weeks for newly arrived families and members of the school staff;
- forming an "Ambassador Club" in which student peers became buddies to newcomers;
- offering tutorial assistant services, in which students who were good at particular subjects were recruited to assist other students with their homework on a one-to-one basis. Many of these student tutors were former ESL students;
- making refugee students a school focus through the school newspaper, or announcements. For example, during the Gulf War, the school published a list of emergency telephone numbers of staff who would be available to refugee students.
- establishing a communication system in the school including signage, information sheets, and seminars for refugees and immigrants on topics such as the Ontario educational system and immigration issues; and
- offering ESL sections for regular secondary school courses as well as life skills courses.

All the above school initiatives and practices were limited to schools that happened to offer these specific services. To maximize the effectiveness of such efforts and to ensure that more refugee students could benefit from them,

- ***school programs that have been proven effective should be more widely publicized at the system level for other schools to consider; and***
- ***all these school efforts should be co-ordinated and combined with other new initiatives that take into account the specific needs of refugee students.***

System responses

A cursory examination of the Board's public documents - including special work group reports, Board minutes, Standard Procedures, and public correspondence - indicates that refugee students have been recognized by Board officials since the late 1980s as one of the groups that require additional services. The 1988 ESL/D Work Group report has a special section on refugee students, and has discussed in other parts of the report about the need of "children of war", "students with limited education in their previous country or with significant gaps in education", and "students who require psychological/emotional support in addition to language and upgrading assistance". A recent ESL report, Review of ESL Programs and Services (November 1993), also identified refugee students as one of the six issues to be addressed in the review. In addition, the Board's Youth Alienation report (April 1991), and the Board's Standard Procedure 34 on student reception, placement, transitions and transfer (1989) also have their separate sections on refugee students.

Aside from identifying their needs, some actions have since been taken at the system level. The establishment of the two Welcoming/Reception Centres - the Bickford Centre in 1989, and the Greenwood Centre in 1990 - in the wake of the ESL/D final report has been one of the most significant services offered by the Board to new refugee and immigrant families. In 1990, a formal submission was filed by the Board to the federal government for funding support and co-ordination of services for immigrant and specifically refugee students. Related to this, the Board has worked in partnership with Employment and Immigrant Canada and local community agencies for the last few years in delivering language classes to thousands of adult immigrant and refugee students in the city with full funding from the federal government (under its immigrant language training program, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada - LINC). Other smaller-scale efforts included compiling an informal resource list of

support staff for schools with refugee students, and offering occasional workshops for interested staff on refugee students.

While all these are worthwhile endeavours that need to be continued, perhaps a mechanism is necessary to ensure that the Board policies, programs and concerns for refugee students are effectively translated to the school and classroom level. In the final chapter that follows, all the above-mentioned individual staff's initiatives, exemplary school practices, the recommendations in the recent ESL Review Report, and some other Board's policies and programs, along with specific proposals made by various interest groups, will be incorporated into a suggestion scheme and a work plan, in order to help individual schools and the school system develop more comprehensive services for this new and growing student population. As was documented throughout, for many refugee students, school is their only contact with the "Canadian" people and the mainstream culture. Hence, ***the school itself can play a key role not only as an institution for learning, but also as an important channel for refugee students to link, adjust and eventually integrate into the new society.***

Chapter 8

What can be done?

Aside from gaining a better understanding of refugee students, and of how school staff respond to their needs, this study has also garnered a myriad of practices and suggestions from different interest groups as to how the Board, individual schools and teachers can help address the issue. Since the input was so voluminous and varied, ranging from broad proposals to specific recommendations, listing them all would be of little practical use. Instead, each of the suggestions or initiatives will be considered under one of the following types of actions:

1. Provision and dissemination of information: Suggestions that have to do with compiling and disseminating of existing information related to the issue could be implemented by appropriate Board departments.

2. Activities suggested for individual schools: These include specific suggestions and practices as to how individual schools and their staff can better serve the needs of refugee students. Since most of the suggested actions are congruent with the Board policies and initiatives, they can be adapted and adopted by school administrators or their staff.

3. Actions for the system to consider: These are proposals that are beyond the mandate of individual departments or schools, and require endorsement, commitment, efforts and/or funding at the school system level.

Provision and dissemination of information

Two of the major needs identified by teachers and various student support groups is access to information about refugee students, and resources on how to manage the situation. After consultation with Refugee Advisory Team members, it was decided that any currently available information pertinent to the issue will be compiled and disseminated by various departments of the Board according to the following plan.

Research Services

1. Research Services will disseminate this refugee report broadly:

    a. within the School Board, including Education Offices and various Board Committees such as the ESL Trustee/Staff Committee, the Race Relations Committee, the Parent Involvement Committee, and the International Language and Concurrent Programs Consultative Committee (ILACON).

    b. to external agencies and organizations, including other school boards, the Ministry of Education and Training, faculties of education, the Immigration and Refugee Board, various government agencies such as Welcome House, other pertinent social agencies, and different related ethnic community organizations.

2. Based on the findings of this report, Research Services will develop a fact sheet(s) about Toronto's refugee students, which will also be widely distributed, especially to individual school staff.

3. Using the identification method developed in this study, Research Services will identify and track "potential" refugee students enroled in Toronto schools; and will prepare updated lists of refugee students for individual schools who want to monitor their refugee students and address the needs of these students.

The Curriculum and Program Division & Student Support Services

With appropriate assistance, the Curriculum and Program Division and Student Support Services will compile resource packages for school staff on how to deal with refugee students and the issue. The packages may consist of:

- lists of resources where refugee students can seek help and information.
- lists of reference materials for teachers - e.g. teachers' guide or handbooks, and resource materials for class activities.
- resources for comprehensive first-language assessments for newly arrived students.
- information about appropriate advice for mature refugee students with a secondary or post-secondary educational background - e.g. suggesting proper placement, or offering alternatives to ensure shortest routes into post-secondary education[41] instead of having these students repeat their secondary school years. This information is particularly important for such front-line staff as guidance counsellors and reception workers.

The Public Information Office

The Public Information Office, with appropriate assistance, will prepare information kits for refugee students and families, which may contain the following:

- a booklet or pamphlet with information that is often required by newcomers, e.g. employment, landlord tenant, taxes, community groups, and services.
- an information kit about the school system - how the school works, classroom routines, curriculum, programs, credit requirements, post-secondary education options, international language programs, etc. The kit may include such Board's publications as Your Choice, and should be given out at the time of students' registration. The kit should also be used by interpreters and translators trained by the Board.
- Parents Ask book as a handout to the newly arrived families.
- information about Greenwood and Bickford Reception Centres and their services.

If possible the above information packages should be made available in the necessary languages.

The Public Information Office will also co-ordinate distribution of above information kits to appropriate ethnic community groups as well as various language-based parent associations.

---

41. This includes information on how to get their equivalent credits, or a few qualification courses for applying for university or college without unnecessary delays and inappropriate placement.

Activities suggested for individual schools: A whole-school approach

Many of the suggestions gathered in this study are specific proposals applicable at the school and classroom level. They reinforce the Board's existing philosophy and initiatives, and make innovative use of other available resources that may have previously been underutilized. In order to put this multitude of suggestions into perspective, an optimal scenario is presented with suggestions grouped into eight types; each type (as listed in a box) is placed in a specific context of the scenario (in *italics*).

(1) Reception/Welcoming Centres. *While some refugee students had availed themselves of the services provided at the two Toronto Board Reception/Welcoming Centres, many did not or were not cognizant of the services. Consequently, before refugee students enrol in a Toronto school, it is advisable that the students and their families visit one of the two Reception/Welcoming Centres, where family members would be given a welcoming reception, and the students aged 12 and over would be properly assessed and placed, and be offered the necessary initial assistance. Also, all students, including those under the age of 12, would have a student profile completed. In order to make this happen, the following suggestions should be considered.*

- To publicize the functions and services of Greenwood and Bickford Centres to school administrators and staff - for example, to make Welcoming Centres' brochures widely available to school staff; to invite Welcoming Centres staff to school principals' meetings to discuss their services.
- To encourage school administrators to refer refugee students and families to the Reception/Welcoming Centres before enroling the students in school.
- To make more use of the Centres for follow-up assistance to refugee families.
- To encourage newly arrived refugee students to approach the Reception Centres for information and assistance.
- To provide in-service for reception staff, especially in assessment (including first-language assessment) and placement procedures.
- To evaluate the current services offered by the Centres.

(2) School-based reception. *Given the refugee students' unique circumstances, it is most important that, upon arrival to their new school, they be given a warm welcome by the staff and their classmates. In addition, students with educational interruptions or gaps might need a special orientation period. They might benefit from being with someone who speaks their languages or shares a similar background. This might help reduce the students' disorientation or emotional stress during their initial transition and adjustment. Accordingly, the following suggestions are made.*

- To have the staff, students and parents of each school collaborate on the design and implementation of a planned welcoming and orientation procedure for all newly-arrived students and their families. Such plan should be communicated to the school superintendent and to staff new to the school. (Reference: ESL/D Work Group Report; Handbook for Reception Welcoming Centre and Local School Staff, e.g. Orde Street Public School Parent Network; Task Force V; Restructuring and Transitions; and Advisor/Advisee Programs.)

- To develop a school-based reception program - Instead of putting new refugee students into regular classes when they first arrive, they should be in a small group setting for a period of time on a full- or part-time basis. The purpose is to give these students some time to adjust to the new environment, where they can familiarize themselves with the system, get more individual attention, and have instruction explained to them - e.g. how to manage their books and paper.

- To use international language programs as part of the reception, orientation and cultural services.

(3) Student assessment. *As discussed earlier in the report, due to the pre-migration and migration experiences of refugee students, schooling for many of these students has often been interrupted, fragmented or even lacking. Hence, it is difficult to determine their academic level according to their chronological age. Moreover, cultural and language differences have made it even more challenging to assess their cognitive abilities. It is thus crucial for appropriate school staff to conduct with relevant resources thorough and "unbiased" assessments of the students' academic and social needs.*

- To thoroughly assess the needs of individual refugee students in light of their past schooling/experiences and current personal and family situations, in order to offer the most appropriate school experience as well as the kinds of support (e.g. emotional/financial) necessary. The assessment might have to be conducted through the Local School Team (LST) or the Guidance Office with the assistance of trained multi-lingual staff.

- To ensure that teachers or other pertinent staff who receive new refugee students from another school or reception centres would review and use all related documents that come with the students - e.g. assessment information from the Reception Centres, or their OSRs and other relevant information transferred from students' previous schools in Ontario. Such efforts should be made by the school principal and the LST.

(4) Support in first language. *Once these new students are placed in their classroom, it would be helpful to pair them with a "buddy" or "buddies" who speak their language - to translate or explain information and to provide social support. At the same time, these students should be given instructional assistance in their own language, if necessary, during the transition period in order to accelerate their adjustment and learning process.*

- To develop a buddy system for new students by matching them, if possible, with their co-nationals who have been in Canada for a longer period of time, and later on teaming the new students with local students. (Reference: Co-op program, Link with secondary and elementary schools, Equity Co-op program at Howard School.)

- To use first language, whenever possible, during the transitional period as a bridge in the acquisition of the second language to avoid academic delays. This will require a review of curriculum and utilizing all available resources such as international/heritage language instructors (Reference: the ESL Program at Alex Muir/Gladstone Public School).

- To continue to support and develop the first language tutoring and peer tutoring programs both at the Board level and the school level. (Reference: First Language Tutoring Handbook and Inservice; Advisor/Advisee Program.)

(5) Classroom programs. *In the classroom, these students should be made to feel welcome and that they have equal status, while other students should be sensitive to these students' background. Also, the refugee students need every opportunity in school to expose themselves to the mainstream culture and society.*

- To promote, encourage and support inclusive curriculum initiatives that are cross-curricular.
- To make refugee populations one of the foci so that the content, research, investigations, presentations will provide all students with knowledge, understanding and appreciation of each other. The results of these curriculum initiatives, in turn, will be available to provide teachers and administrators with background information about refugees. (Reference: Restructuring, Transitions, Integrated Studies, Inclusive Curriculum, Self and Society, Global Education, Pacific Rim Interdisciplinary Project, Toronto Board Co-op Theatre Company.)
- To continue to involve ESL students in field trips, even if subsidies are required.
- To communicate with parents about the value of these curricular and extra-curricular activities.

(6) Support outside the classroom. *Refugee students need support beyond their classroom. Often these students are either unaware of available support services within their school or too inhibited to avail themselves of such assistance. To encourage these students' use of the existing support services, the following suggestions should be considered.*

- To facilitate these students' access to support staff services by, for example:
  - having an introductory session in which student support staff introduce themselves, and invite students to approach them about issues;
  - having a specific place where a range of support staff are available for students with problems or needs; and
  - improving co-ordination of health, education and social services for refugee students in schools.

- To offer *group* guidance for students from the same country so that students with similar experiences could express and discuss their problems and frustrations. Such small groups can be set up through Guidance and ESL departments to:
  - enhance refugee students' self esteem, and build their confidence to participate more in class and extra-curricular activities; and
  - help these students become more pro-active around equity and bias issues.

- To waive requirement of six-week delay for new students to be referred to Special Education/Resource Room in order to use this as a reception, small group, or one-on-one strategy.

(7) Parent involvement. *While support is given to the students, the importance of involving their parents should not be overlooked. As documented in the study, for various reasons school participation among refugee parents is often minimal. Efforts, such as the following, should be made to familiarize them with the educational system, and to promote their involvement in school.*

- To encourage parents to attend school interviews or meetings by letting them know that interpreters would be available - "Interpreters are a great drawing card."
- To create reception programs for parents (which could be parent-organized and led) to provide them with emotional support and information about their own rights - in order to increase the opportunity for them to meet the teachers.
- To offer such programs as Family Math and Open House to get parents to come to the school and become involved in their child's education.
- To facilitate the creation of language-based parent groups - so that parents themselves could share their concerns, articulate their needs, or even co-ordinate their own efforts in supporting themselves and their children.

(8) Support for school staff. *Last but not least, teachers and other staff within the school also need support in order to program effectively for refugee students.*

- To utilize the Local School Team to address and monitor the needs of individual and groups of refugee students on a regular basis in order to ensure immediate intervention and long-term prevention programs, rather than waiting for teacher-initiated referrals.
- To inform school staff as well as students in general of the needs of newcomers, particularly those of refugees. This can be done through school assemblies, staff meetings or school publications.
- To facilitate interdepartmental communication and rapport in order to ensure concerted effort in meeting the needs of refugee students, e.g. among regular classroom/subject teachers, ESL staff, international language instructors, and guidance counsellors.
- To share with other schools and the Board as a whole exemplary school-based programs or initiatives that have been beneficial to refugee students - e.g. integrated international/heritage language programs at Alex Muir/Gladstone Pubic School and Ryerson Public School.
- To tap other resources that have traditionally been underutilized as support staff for teachers. For example,
  - re-defining the role of international language facilitators so that they might provide more direct assistance to immigrant and refugee students as well as teachers.
  - enlisting the service of school community advisors (S.C.A.'s) in, for example, linking refugee parents to the school.

Two points need to be noted. First, the model described above is ***a whole-school approach***, in which all staff, including the international language instructors and school community advisors who have traditionally been considered as peripheral support, are expected to be involved in a concerted manner. Second, in order to ensure that their efforts are effective, it is advisable for the school to evaluate its programs, either formally or informally. (Research Services and the Curriculum Division, specifically the ESL/ESD Department, are available for consultation or assistance if necessary.) Not only can such evaluations ascertain the efficacy of the initiatives, but it can also indicate how the programs can further be improved in order to serve the needs of the target students effectively - in this case, refugee students.

Actions for the school system to consider

While individual schools can play an important role in meeting the needs of their refugee students, and appropriate support departments can supply needed information, these local initiatives and efforts are not sufficient to address the whole issue of refugee students. There are important proposals that require system-wide support, commitment and/or funding. For example, the Board can facilitate an action plan for implementing the findings of this Refugee Report. Furthermore, there are external agencies with which the Board can liaise to ensure a more concerted effort in dealing with such a broad social issue.

Support needed at the Board level

1. First and foremost is the need for **in-service** and/or pre-service for school and education office staff and other related personnel such as welcome/reception workers and international language instructors. The goals are:

    - to sensitize the staff to the issue by making them aware of the refugee condition, e.g. the overall situation, refugees' past and present plight, and the difficulties and challenges faced by refugees;

    - to offer strategies for different professional groups to address the academic, social and emotional needs of refugee students.

    The issues and materials to be covered in the in-service:

    - should be connected to the research findings from both the present report and the ESL Review Report (1993-94); and

    - should also be integrated with the Board's existing policies and programs such as inclusive curriculum, equity/anti-racist education and conflict resolution.

    The facilitators should involve:

    - the ESL/ESD Department, the Staff Development Division, the Equity Centre, the Equal Opportunity Office, and other pertinent support staff such as reception/welcome workers, as well as faculties of education. The latter can contribute in light of their expertise as well as the important role they play in preparing prospective teachers.

2. In addition to the existing **ESL programs**, continued and expanded efforts have to be made to provide refugee students, when necessary, with defined orientation and beginning literacy programs with first language support and materials.

3. The **Reception Welcoming Centres** should use first language personnel and their expertise to gather complete background information from families as well as to conduct academic assessments in first language. It is also important to evaluate the effectiveness of the current reception programs for newcomers and their services with refugee students.

4. The Board can make more effective use of existing **bilingual support staff**.

    - The deployment of student support staff especially those who speak different languages should be re-evaluated in order to match the needs and demands of individual schools. For example, it is important to assure that bilingual social workers for most recently arrived groups, especially Tamil, Somali, Ethiopian (Tigrinya and Amharic), and Vietnamese - are accessible to schools which need the service.

    - Interpreters need to be trained on an on-going basis, especially about the school system; school and student support staff also require training on how to use interpreters effectively.

    - Bilingual educational assistants should be shared among teachers who need the service.

    - First Language Tutors/Mentors trained by the Board should be engaged in supporting students identified as needing a better foundation and/or support in first language.

5. The Board should develop **specific expanded opportunity programs**, for example summer school with first language support, for students who are not meeting the grade outcomes as outlined in the Board's "A Curriculum for All Students".

6. **An on-going committee** and/or special personnel should be assigned to deal specifically with refugees and their needs on a continuous basis. Such a committee or person can also work at each school with a contact person who acts formally as a mentor or an advocate for refugee students.

External support needed

1. Efforts should be made to involve **ethnic community groups**, including community-based parent groups, to play a more supportive role in, for example, outlining what they can do for students, or developing outreach programs to help refugee students adjust to their new environment.

2. The Board can liaise with such social and community agencies as COSTI (Centro Organizzativo Scuole Tecniche Italiane) which offer direct settlement and/or mental health services to newly arrived refugee families. Their services and information are valuable resources that the Board and its staff can tap into for addressing the needs of their refugee students.

3. The Board can also enlist the support of **post-secondary school students** by having university students of different ethnic groups visit secondary schools in order to encourage refugee students to consider that option; or by having graduate students from appropriate practicum programs, e.g. Applied Psychology, help with cross-cultural counselling in schools.

4. Finally, it is crucial to maintain dialogues with both **the provincial and federal governments** about the critical need for funding and support of programs for immigrant and refugee students - e.g. to liaise with government sources regarding refugee students' need for OSAP and other financial assistance to fund their education.[42]

42. The study conducted by Canadian School Trustees' Association (CSTA) offers some concrete suggestions. See CSTA's report, Scholastic adaptation and cost effectiveness of programs for immigrant/refugee children in Canadian schools (1989).

References

Ali, B.H. (October 1990). The dilemma of Somali refugees. Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 10(1), 15.

Allodi, F., & Cowgill, G. (1982). Ethical and psychiatric aspects of torture: A Canadian study. Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. 27, 98-102.

Ballon, D. (1993, March 25). Somali students struggle to adapt to an alien world. The Toronto Star, pp.D1, D3.

Brown, R.S., Cheng, M., Yau, M., & Ziegler, S. (May 1992). The every secondary student survey, Part I: Initial findings. Toronto Board of Education: Research Services (Report # 200).

Brown, R.S. (in press). "Mobility in the Toronto Board: An analysis of student movement and education outcomes". Toronto Board of Education: Research Services.

Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees. (1988). After the door has been opened: Mental health issues affecting immigrants and refugees in Canada. Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees. (1988). Review of the literature on migrant mental health. Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Canadian School Trustees' Association. (1989). Scholastic adaptation and cost effectiveness of programs for immigrant/refugee children in Canadian schools.

Canadian Teachers' Federation. (1990). Responding to the needs of immigrant and refugee children.

Canadian Teachers' Federation. (1992). Immigrant and refugee children in the classroom: A survey of teacher training needs. Toronto: LRS Training & Education.

Carter, B., & Mok, W.Y. (1992). Newcomer children: Rights, needs and adjustment. Employment and Immigration Canada: Settlement Directorate Immigration Division.

Cheng, M., & Soudack, A. (1994). Anti-racist education: A literature review. Toronto Board of Education: Research Services (Report # 206).

Cheng, M., Yau, M., & Ziegler, S. (Fall 1993). The every secondary student survey, Part II: Detailed profiles of Toronto's secondary school students. Toronto Board of Education: Research Services (Report # 204).

Cole, E., & Siegel, J.A. (1990). School psychology in a multicultural community: Responding to children's needs. In E. Cole & J.A. Siegel (Eds.), Effective consultation in school psychology (pp.141-169). Toronto: Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.

Cole, E., Siegel, J., & Yau, M. (1990). The Local School Team: Goals, roles and functions. Toronto Board of Education: Research Services (Report # 194).

Commins, N.L. (1992). Parents and public schools: The experiences of four Mexican immigrant families. Equity and Choice. 8(2), 40-45.

Duran, M. (1990). Some thoughts concerning the education of refugee children. Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 10(2), 3-6.

Employment and Immigration Canada. (1991). Immigration statistics, 1990. Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Freire, M. (1988). Refugee families and their children. Unpublished manuscript. Toronto.

Freire, M. (1990). Refugees: ESL and literacy. Trying to reinvent the self in a new language. Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 10(2), 3-6.

Hicks, R., Lalonde, R., & Pepler, D. Immigrant and refugee children: Psycho-social considerations. Unpublished Manuscript. York University: Department of Psychology.

Ishiyama, F.I. (1989). Understanding foreign adolescents' difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment: A self-validation model. Canadian Journal of School Psychology. 5, 41-56.

Kaprielian-Churchill, I. (1991). Refugee children in the classrrom: Life before Canada. Orbit. 10(2), 2-7.

Kaprielian-Churchill, I., & Churchill, S. (1994). The pulse of the world: Refugees in our schools. Toronto: OISE Press.

Lam, Y.L.J. (1993). Placement of immigrant children. The Canadian School Executive, 13(1), 28-29.

Mansour, V. (1991, July 8). Guatemala's children: Old before their time, they work from dawn to dusk amid the ravages of war. The Toronto Star.

Meyers, M. (1993). What's the difference? Refugee children in our schools. Unpublished manuscript. Toronto.

Pentland, S., & Racicot, D. (May 1986). Salvadorean refugees in Honduras. Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 5(4), 3-5.

Preston, R. (1990). Is there a refugee specific education? Convergence. 23(3), 3-10.

Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees. 6(4). A special issue on refugees and war in Africa.

Rutter, J. (1991). Refugees: We left because we had to. London: The Refugee Council.

Seevaratnam, P. (199?). Counselling immigrants is more than words.

Staff. (1992, November 28). A home called Dixon. The Globe and Mail, pp. D1, D4.

Toronto Board of Education. (September 1994). A curriculum for all students: Junior kindergarten - Grade 9. (A working document).

Toronto Board of Education. (April 1988). ESL/D Work Group: Final report.

Toronto Board of Education. (February 1990). Making immigration policy work: A submission to Employment and Immigration Canada.

Toronto Board of Education. (1993). Review of ESL programs and services. Toronto Board of Education.

Toronto Board of Education. (May 1989). Student reception, placement, transitions and transfers: Standard Procedure 34.

Toronto Board of Education. (1991). The social environment of schooling in a large urban centre: Dealing with youth alienation.

Yau, M., Cheng, M., & Ziegler, S. (Fall 1993). The every secondary student survey, Part III: Program level and student achievement. Toronto Board of Education: Research Services (Report # 205).

Appendix 1

Interview Protocol for School-aged Refugee Students

(A) School Experiences in Toronto

1. School(s) attended in Toronto:

   - When did you start attending school after you arrived in Toronto? [If more than a month, explain why.]

   - Is this your first school since arriving in Toronto? If not, what were the other schools? How about Bickford Centre or Greenwood Centre?

   - Who helped you find the school(s)? / How did you learn about the school(s)?

   - How many years have you been in this school?

   - *[For secondary school students only.]* Are you familiar with the present school system? e.g. how to get a secondary school diploma, how to get to college or university, etc.

   - Do you like coming to school? Name a few things you like about the school, and a few things you don't like.

2. Class experiences:

   - What subjects/courses are you taking this year?

   - Which subjects do you like most? Why?

   - In what class(es) do you take your different subjects? e.g. regular class with other students, special class such as ESL, or both. If both, which subjects are taken in ESL class and which subjects in regular class?

   - Which class do you prefer to attend - ESL class or regular class? Why?

     [If the student attends both classes, make sure that he/she answers the following two questions twice - once in terms of ESL class/teachers, and the second time in terms of regular class/teachers.]

   - How often do you speak up (e.g. asking and/or answering questions, participating in group discussions) in class? If seldom, why? Do you want to?

   - Do you understand your teacher's instructions most of the time? What do you do if you do not? What does your teacher do? *[Repeat the above and this questions if the student attends both ESL and regular classes.]*

3. Relationships with teachers and other students:

- How do you feel about your teacher(s) - ESL teacher and regular teacher(s)?

- *[If the student attends regular classes, ask this question.]* Do you find your teacher(s) treat you differently from other students? How would you like your teacher(s) to treat you?

- Have you been able to make friends in school? Who are they? [classmates, students with similar backgrounds, etc.]

- How do you feel about other students in your ESL class and/or regular class?

- Do you know other students in your school or class who have similar experience to you? Do you have any contact with these students?

- Do you think your classmates or teachers are interested in knowing about your past experiences?

- Do you talk about your past and/or current experiences with your teacher or classmates? If not, would you like to?

4. Problems or difficulties at school:

   - What are your greatest difficulties in school (social, learning, language, being able to keep up with others, understanding teachers' instructions, etc.)? / What kinds of things make you feel most uneasy at school?

   - Have you experienced any disturbing incidents in school - e.g. name calling, put downs, stigmatization, being bullied? If yes, who were the ones who make you feel uncomfortable?

5. Help and support:

   - When you have needs or difficulties, who helps you in school? What kinds of help have been offered to you?

   - Have you helped others in school? How?

   - What would you like to see happening in this school to help students new to the country?

6. Extra-curricular activities:

   - Have you participated in any extra-curricular activities after school?
     What other extra-curricular activities would you like to have in your present school?

(B) Outside-school Experiences

1. What was it like when you first came to Toronto?

- What do you like about Toronto? What don't you like? weather, language, culture, social life, diet, custom, government agencies, etc.

2. What was your happiest time since coming to Canada?

3. What do you usually do after school or on weekends? With whom? - [family members only, relatives, someone from the same background or community, neighbours, etc.]

4. After school, who helps you with your schoolwork/homework?

5. How often do you talk about your school with your parents or other family members? If seldom, why?

6. Are you worried about whether you can stay in this country?

7. Do you have problems sleeping, eating, etc. (physical symptoms)? If yes, how often?

8. Do you regret leaving your homeland and coming to this country (Often, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)? If often or sometimes, why?

(C) Students' Previous History

1. Did you attend school in your home country?

   - If no, why?

   - If yes,

     * for how many years?

     * what were the major differences between the school in your home country and the present school - e.g. setting (rural vs. urban), materials / classroom resources, class size, number of teachers, available subjects, etc?

     * what were your favourite subjects?

     * is there anything you missed about your old school?

2. Why do you think your parents wanted to leave the home country? [any life threatening situations - political, hunger, etc.]

3. Did you yourself want to leave your country?

4. Did you and your family stay in some other country/countries before coming to Canada? If yes, where did you stay? For how long? Did you attend school at that time?

(D) Aspirations

1. If you could make three wishes for the next two years, what would they be? (Don't think just about school but about everything in your life.)

2. What would you like to do in the future? Do you know how you can achieve that?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Appendix 2

Interview Protocol for Adult Refugee Students

(A) School Experiences in Toronto

1. School(s) attended in Toronto

   - When did you start attending school after you arrived in Toronto? [If more than a month, explain why.]

   - Is this your first school since arriving in Toronto? If not, what were the other schools? How about Bickford Centre or Greenwood Centre?

   - Who helped you find the school(s)? / How did you learn about the school(s)?

   - How many years have you been in this school?

   - Are you familiar with the present school system? e.g. how to get a secondary school diploma, how to get to college or university, etc.

   - Do you like your current school? Name a few things you like about the school, and a few things you don't like.

2. Class experiences:

   - What subjects/courses are you taking this year?

   - Which subjects do you like most? Why?

   - Do you find the courses you are taking useful for your personal needs?

   - In what class(es) do you take your different subjects? e.g. regular class with other students, special class such as ESL, or both. If both, which subjects are taken in ESL class and which subjects in regular class?

   - Which class do you prefer to attend - ESL class or regular class? Why?

     [If the student attends both classes, make sure that he/she answers the following two questions twice - once in terms of ESL class/teachers, and the second time in terms of regular class/teachers.]

   - How often do you speak up (e.g. asking and/or answering questions, participating in group discussions) in class? If seldom, why? Do you want to?

   - Do you understand your teacher's instructions most of the time? What do you do if you do not? What does your teacher do? *[Repeat the above and this questions if the student attends both ESL and regular classes.]*

3. Relationships with teachers and other students:

   - How do you feel about your teacher(s) - ESL teacher and regular teacher(s)?
   - *[If the student attends regular classes, ask this question.]* Do you find your teacher(s) treat you differently from other students? How would you like your teacher(s) to treat you?
   - Have you been able to make friends in school? Who are they? [classmates, students with similar backgrounds, etc.]
   - How do you feel about other students in your ESL class and/or regular class?
   - Do you know other students in your school or class who have similar experience to you? Do you have any contact with these students?
   - Do you think your classmates or teachers are interested in knowing about your past experiences?
   - Do you talk about your past and/or current experiences with your teacher or classmates? If not, would you like to?

4. Problems or difficulties at school:

   - What are your greatest difficulties in school (social, learning, language, being able to keep up with others, understanding teachers' instructions, etc.)? / What kinds of things make you feel most uneasy at school?
   - Have you experienced any disturbing incidents in school - e.g. name calling, put downs, stigmatization, bullying? If yes, who were the ones who make you feel uncomfortable?

5. Help and support:

   - When you have needs or difficulties, who helps you in school? What kinds of help have been offered to you?
   - Have you helped others in school? How?
   - What would you like to see happening in this school to help students new to the country?

6. Extra-curricular activities:

   - Have you participated in any extra-curricular activities after school?
   - What other extra-curricular activities would you like to have in your present school?

(B) Outside-school Experiences

1. Experiences when first arrived in Toronto

    - physically - accommodations, finding jobs (present occupation), working hours, financial situations
    - emotionally - relaxed, settled, enjoying, anxious, worried, concerned, etc.
    - socially - social support - relatives, friends, community, government agencies, etc.
    - language proficiency.

2. What was your happiest time since coming to Canada?
3. Are you worried about whether you can stay in this country?
4. Do you regret leaving your homeland and coming to this country (Often, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)? If often or sometimes, why?

(C) Students' Previous History

1. Type of occupations before leaving the country.
2. Reasons for leaving the country - economic, political reasons, etc.
3. Describe briefly the kind of social/political experiences that you or your family had gone through before coming to this country.
4. How did you leave the country?
5. Other countries of residence prior to arrival in Canada. For how long?
6. Initial/current status in Canada; prospects for permanent residency status.

(D) Expectations and Aspirations

1. What were your expectations in coming to this country?
2. If you could make three wishes for the next two years, what would they be? (Don't think just about school but about everything in your life.)
3. What would you like to do after finishing high school? Do you know how you can achieve that?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Appendix 3

Interview Protocol for Refugee Parents

1. Your child's experiences at school:

    - When did your child start attending school after he/she arrived in Toronto? If it took more than a month, why?
    - Is this his/her first school in Toronto?
    - Who helped you find the school(s) for your child?
    - Does your child often tell you about his/her school? How often do you have the chance to talk with your child about his/her school?
    - Do you think your child is enjoying his/her school? What do you think he/she likes most about the school?
    - Do you think he/she has any difficulties or special needs at school - language, school work, relationships with teachers and other students?
    - Do you have any suggestions as to how the school can meet his/her needs?
    - Does your child have any health problems or problems sleeping or eating that may affect his/her school work?

2. Experiences you have had entering the education system [only for those parents who have gone to a reception centre in Toronto]:

    - Did/do you go to one of the Reception Welcoming Centres - e.g. the Bickford Centre, the Greenwood Centre?
    - Describe how you were/are received in the school?
    - What were/are the positives and the negatives?
    - Do you find the English classes useful? How?

3. Experiences you have had as a family settling in Toronto:

    - physically - accommodations, finding jobs (present occupation), working hours, financial situations
    - emotionally - relaxed, settled, enjoying, anxious, worried, concerned, etc.
    - socially - social support - relatives, friends, community, government agencies, etc.
    - language proficiency.

4. Migration history

    - type of occupations before leaving the country

- reasons for leaving the country - economic, political reasons, etc.

- describe briefly the kind of social/political experiences that you or your family had gone through before coming to this country

- how did you leave the country?

- other countries of residence prior to arrival in Canada

- initial/current status in Canada; prospects for permanent residency status.

5. Expectations in coming to this country:

    - for yourselves; and

    - for your children.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION AND INFORMATION

Appendix 4

Protocol for Teachers' Focus Group Meeting

(I) Teacher's Awareness: (10 minutes)

- Are you aware that there are refugee students in your class? Or how long did it take you to know that?

- What makes you think that they are refugees?

    * number of refugee students
    * countries of origin
    * characteristics

- Can you somehow distinguish between refugee students and immigrant students?

- How much do you know about the history and backgrounds of these students? Do you have the chance to know them?

- Do you know if any of your refugee students had visited Bickford Centre or the Greenwood Centre before coming to your school? If yes, was the student information provided by the Reception/Welcoming Centre useful?

[If teachers are not clear who their refugee students are, show them some of the students' names before discussing the following issues.]

(II) Teacher's Perception: (15 minutes)

- Describe their classroom behaviours - normal, attentive, withdrawn, submissive, passive (seldom participate), hyperactive, aggressive, regressive, etc.
  Do you notice any change in their behaviour since they first arrived?

- Describe their school work and performance, especially their progress.

- What is the relationship of your refugee students among themselves and with the other students?

- Have refugee students had positive influence on other students?

- Have you noticed any racial incidents experienced by these refugee students - name calling, discrimination, isolation, etc. in your class or at the school in general?

- Do you think they have special needs or difficulties different from (i) ESL/immigrant students and (ii) other students? [When discussing this question, think about (a) the kinds of needs or problems that are common to all refugee students in general, and (b) needs or problems that are unique to individual groups of refugees.

    * understanding teacher instructions

    * language problems, learning difficulties, etc.

    * health problems, physical symptoms (sleeping or eating disorders), emotional problems (depression), cultural shocks

    * behavioural or attitude problems

- Have any particular groups of refugee students presented some unique issues or concerns?

(III) Dealing with the Students: (15 minutes)

- How do you deal with their difficulties and needs?

    * What strategies have you attempted? - referrals, LSTs, peer support, etc.

    * Which resources have been most helpful? How?

- Have you yourselves encountered difficulties in coping with these students?

    * e.g. different cultural backgrounds, different value systems, different ways of responding to teachers, or different teacher-student relationships.

- How have you sought to resolve your own difficulties? Successfully? What other resources or additional support are required?

- Do you have the chance to meet with the parents/ guardians of these students? Describe the contacts. What suggestions do you have regarding parent/teacher involvement?

- What are some of the positive experiences you have had teaching refugees?

(IV) School Support: (10 minutes)

- Are refugee students being considered an important issue in your school?

- How are the refugee students made to feel welcome at school?

- What does the school perceive as needs of refugee students?

- What kinds of services are available in your school that help the refugee students?

- What are the general attitudes of other teachers toward refugee students?

- What roles do you think other school support staff should play?

- Do you have any suggestions as to how your school and the Board should handle the refugee situation, especially in light of the growing number refugees who will be enrolling in our school system?

Appendix 5

Protocol for Principals' Focus Group Meeting

REFUGEE STUDENT PROJECT

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL FOCUS GROUP MEETING

Some suggested issues for the group discussion*:

1. Some background information:
   - Do you have a rough idea about the number of refugee students in your school?
   - What are the countries of origin of these students? Are there any major ethnic groups?
   - Does your school have a long history of refugee students? Describe the trends.
2. Do you think refugee students have special <u>needs</u> and <u>difficulties</u> that are different from other students?
3. Have any particular groups of refugee students presented some unique issues or concerns to your teachers or your school in general?
4. How does your school help these students and meet their needs?
5. Have your teachers or your school in general encountered any difficulties in dealing with these students' concerns?
6. Do you have any suggestions as to how your school and the Board should handle the refugee situation, especially in light of the growing number refugees who will be enrolling in our school system?

Some reminders:

- Use a tape recorder if possible.
- Inform the principals about the purpose of the project.
- Remind the principals that the information discussed at the meeting will be treated confidentially, and will be reported anonymously as research data.
- Try to have <u>all</u> principals discuss <u>all</u> the issues.
- In the written report, record the response (main ideas only) of each principal (with identification) to each of the issues.

---

* If any of the principals say that they do not identify students as refugees, ask them to think about the new students from some of the major refugee countries when discussing the following issues.

Appendix 6

Protocol for Focus Group Discussion with Support Staff

Refugee Student Project

Protocal for Focus Group Discussion

Facilitator's name: _____

Professional group to be interviewed: _____

Date: _____

****

Issues and questions that need to be covered in the group discussion:

- Number of refugee students that each member has been dealing with.
- Countries of origin, and age range of the refugee students.
- What are the common problems and difficulties their refugee students have encountered?
- What are the unique problems and difficulties for different refugee groups?
- What are the needs of these students?
- How do you and your colleagues help these students and meet their needs?
- Do you have any difficulties in dealing with these students' concerns?
- In your opinion, how does each of the following groups tackle the situation?
    * regular classroom /subject area teachers,
    * ESL teachers,
    * special education teachers,
    * school support staff - including guidance counsellors, psycho-educational consultants, social workers, school community advisors, psychiatrists, etc.
    * school administrators (principals and vice principals),
    * the Board,
    * parents and the community, and
    * the government.
- How can each of the above best serve the refugee students?

Appendix 7

Local School Team Observation Guide

Refugee Student Project

Local School Team Observation Guide

Observer's name: _____

School observed: _____

Date: _____

****

Objective: To observe how individual Local School Teams (LSTs) deal with the issue of refugee students.

Things to observe and record:

(A) Background information about the meeting

- Who is present at the meeting?
- When does the meeting take place - date and time?
- How long does the meeting last?
- What role does each participant play at the meeting? e.g. teachers providing information about students, someone else making recommendations, etc.
- Approximately, what proportions of the time are spent discussing student problems, understanding the situations and needs of the students, and/or suggesting solutions?

(B) What is discussed at the meeting?

- When refugee students are discussed, is the emphasis on individual students, specific refugee groups, and/or refugee students as a whole?
- According to the LST members, who are the refugee students? What makes them think the students are refugees? Are other ESL students or immigrant students also perceived as the same group of students?
- According to the LST members, what kinds of needs, problems and/or difficulties do the refugee students have?
- Is there any discussion on what the school and/or individual teachers have already done in helping refugee students?
- Is there any discussion on the difficulties the school staff themselves have in dealing with this issue? E.g. in knowing who these students are; in understanding their situations and needs; and/or in helping these students.
- What are the solutions or recommendations suggested at the meeting? Are the suggestions mainly specific interventions for individual students or school-wide preventive measures?
- What is the conclusion of the meeting?

137

(Please turn over)

(C) What do you think?

- What are the perceptions and attitudes of different LST members toward refugee students?
- How knowledgeable do you think the LST members are about the refugee student issue? E.g. who these students are; what their needs and difficulties are; how to meet the needs of these students; or how to solve their difficulties.
- How important do you think the refugee student issue is to the school?